

Continued Celebration of the Kalends of January in the Medieval Islamic East

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According to tradition, it was Rome's legendary second king Numa Pompilius who invented January and February. By placing the two new months before March, he made the first day, or Kalends, of January the start of the Roman year.¹ Be that as it may, it was not until 153 BCE that newly elected consuls started to assume office on the Kalends of January (*Kalendae Ianuariae*) and a new holiday was born to replace the older new year's customs practiced at the start of March. The Kalends of January ushered in the new year with much private merriment and great public ceremony. The consuls offered sacrifices to Jupiter Optimus Maximus and, by the early empire, Romans of all social classes exchanged gifts (*strenae*). After a day of rest on 2 January, soldiers and government officials in far-flung regions of the empire swore oaths of loyalty, the *vota publica*, and sacrificed to the emperor on the third day of the month.²

By the fourth century CE, the Kalends of January—called simply “the Kalends” (Καλάνδαι) in the Greek-speaking East—initiated a five-day period of empire-wide revelry and gift exchange beginning on

the eve of 1 January. From Gaul to Syria, people dined, drank, and feasted away the daylight and, when night fell, donned beast masks and other disguises to join in torchlit processions. In many places lavish chariot races rounded out the festival's final three days. With its mix of the public and private spheres, the Kalends reinforced a sense of empire-wide unity, constituting an important and well-documented piece of late ancient Graeco-Roman popular culture.³ What became of this major, Mediterranean-wide festival in later centuries after the rise of Christianity and, in turn, of Islam? What broader social historical significance can we glean from its continuance, its transformations, or its obsolescence?

For most regions of the former Roman Empire, this latter-day history of the Kalends has already been told and these questions largely answered. Fourth- and fifth-century churchmen condemned the Kalends, chiding their flocks for participating in what they saw as the festival's pagan customs, yet such condemnations did little to suppress it. In some Christian regions of western Europe, Kalends customs, especially beast mummery, continued in early January until the thirteenth century even as new dates competed for the start

1 Ovid, *Fasti* 1.43–44; Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.13.2–3.

2 On the early history of the Kalends of January, see F. Graf, *Roman Festivals in the Greek East: From the Early Empire to the Middle Byzantine Era* (Cambridge, 2015), 72–76, and M. Meslin, *La fête des kalendes de janvier dans l'empire romain: Étude d'un rituel de Nouvel An* (Brussels, 1970), 1–50. Principal literary sources include Ovid, *Fasti* 1.63–225; Ovid, *Epistulae ex Ponto* 4.4.23–42, 9.17–18; and Herodian, *Ab excessu divi Marci* 1.16.1–2.

3 On the late ancient Kalends see L. Grig, “Interpreting the Kalends of January: A Case Study for Late Antique Popular Culture?” in *Popular Culture in the Ancient World*, ed. L. Grig (Cambridge, 2017), 237–56; Graf, *Roman Festivals*, 128–52; and Meslin, *La fête des kalendes*, 51–118. I will review the principal literary sources for the Roman East in section 1, below.

of the new year.⁴ Islamic Spain and North Africa nurtured into modern times a descendant of the Kalends of January: the festival of *yannayr* (from Latin *Ianuarius*), enjoyed by both Christians and Muslims.⁵ While the popular festival's afterlife in the western Mediterranean has long been known, scholars used to claim that the Kalends disappeared in the eastern Mediterranean after their ban by the Quinisext Council in Trullo in 692. Recently, however, Anthony Kaldellis has demonstrated that the Kalends of January continued to be celebrated in urban and rural Byzantium until at least 1200, long after that ban—and long after first 23 September and then 1 September had replaced 1 January as the start of the civil and ecclesiastical new year.⁶ If the Kalends enjoyed a long and unbroken celebration in Byzantium, what of those eastern provinces of the Roman Empire now under Islamic rule?

Here, a survey of modern scholarship provides little help. Before the 1950s, next to nothing was written about the fate of the Kalends in the post-Roman Islamic East.⁷ Then, in the only study to date, Hady Roger Idris

collected a small number of Arabic sources documenting the festival's celebration in the eastern Islamic Mediterranean.⁸ Idris's intention was to demonstrate that a version of the Kalends, imported from the eastern Mediterranean and hence distinct from the *yannayr*, was celebrated in tenth- and eleventh-century Islamic North Africa. His analysis of these eastern sources was therefore brief and, as I will demonstrate, not without inaccuracies. In time, Idris came to acknowledge that his claim for a medieval North African celebration of the Kalends by that name was unconvincing.⁹

treat below in sections 3 and 4, respectively. M. Š. al-Ālūsī, *Bulūḡ al-arab fī ma'rifat ahwāl al-arab*, 3 vols. (Cairo, 1924), 1:350, briefly mentioned the medieval holiday but did not cite his medieval source or sources. However, al-Ālūsī's principal source must also have been, directly or indirectly, the passage from al-Mas'ūdī discussed below in section 3, given that he locates the Kalends in "*al-šām*" and uses the nearly identical phrase "*wa-hum yuḡbirūna fīhi mina l-farabi wa-l-surūri wa-iqādi l-nirāni*." That said, his spelling of the festival's name (*al-QLND'S*), though attested in other medieval sources to be reviewed below, differs from that given in C. Pellat's modern edition of al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūḡ al-ḡaḥab wa-ma'ādin al-ḡawhar*, ed. C. Pellat, 7 vols. (Beirut, 1965–79).

8 H. R. Idris, "Fêtes chrétiennes célébrées en Ifrīqiya à l'époque zirīde (IV^e siècle de l'Hégire/X^e siècle après J.-C.)," *Revue africaine* 98 (1954): 261–76 at 267–69. I treat his principal source—al-Mas'ūdī—in section 3 below and address the others in section 6.

9 Idris, "Fêtes chrétiennes," 265–67, based his claim on a speculative reading of a single obscure word referring to a non-Muslim holiday that occurs twice in a passage of a tenth- or eleventh-century North African legal text. The text, which survives in a unique manuscript, was composed in al-Qayrawān by the Mālikī jurist al-Qābiṣī (d. 1012): *al-Risāla al-mufaṣṣala li-ahwāl al-mu'allimīn wa-ahkām al-muta'allimīn*, ed. A. Ḥalīd (Tunis, 1986), 154; for a French translation see *al-Tarbiya fī l-islām*, ed. A. F. Ahwānī (Cairo, 1968), 330. The word in question is *al-NBD'S*, which Idris repointed as *al-BND'S* and construed as a deformation of *al-QLND'S* ("Kalends"). Against Idris's argument that the festival was imported from further east, Graf (*Roman Festivals*, 224–25) and Meslin (*La fête des kalendes*, 120–21) suggested that the holiday might be none other than the *yannayr* called by the alternate—and for the Islamic West otherwise unattested—name of Kalends and celebrated continuously from Roman late antiquity. (Graf also discussed the possibility of discontinuity and reintroduction via Byzantium.) The continued use of the name "Kalends" is certainly possible: a Latin inscription from a Christian cemetery at al-Qayrawān dated to the eleventh century refers, according to a postclassical usage, to "the twenty-first day of the Kalends of June" (DIE XXI KL IUNIUS): see A. Mahjoubi, "Nouveau témoignage épigraphique sur la communauté chrétienne de Kairouan au XI^e siècle," *Africa* 1 (1966): 85–103 at 85, n. 1 (with further references), already noted by Idris, "Fêtes chrétiennes," 271–72. However, the numerous late tenth- and early eleventh-century Latin inscriptions from a nearby Christian cemetery in what is

4 M. Harris, *Sacred Folly: A New History of the Feast of Fools* (Ithaca, 2011), 11–24.

5 Sato K., "Yannayr and al-Anṣara: Seasonal Festivals in the Medieval Muslim West," *Journal of Sophia Asian Studies* 30 (2012): 1–14; F. de la Granja, "Fiestas cristianas en al-Andalus (materiales para su estudio)," part 1, "*al-Durr al-munaḡḡam de al-ʿAzafī*," *Al-Andalus* 34 (1969): 1–53; idem, "Fiestas cristianas en al-Andalus (materiales para su estudio)," part 2, "Textos de Turḡūṣī, el cadī ʿIyād y Wanṣarīsī," *Al-Andalus* 35 (1970): 119–43.

6 A. Kaldellis, "The Kalends in Byzantium, 400–1200 AD: A New Interpretation," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 13 (2012): 187–203, arguing on the basis of testimonies in Psellus, Tzetzes, Eustathius, and Balsamon. See now also Graf, *Roman Festivals*, 219–25. As Kaldellis himself observes, some of the twelfth-century material was previously noted but never fully explored by others (e.g., F. R. Trombley, "Calends," *ODB* 1:367–68). The first of September became the start of the Byzantine civil year by the second half of the fifth century, replacing 23 September, which as the *Natalis Augusti* had marked the civil new year since the early fourth century. The Byzantine ecclesiastical calendar, whose cycle had also previously begun on 23 September, soon followed suit. In fact, starting in the early eighth century, 1 September began to claim a newfound liturgical status of its own: see further R. F. Taft, "Calendar, Church," *ODB* 1:366; B. Croke and A. Kazhdan, "Chronology," *ODB* 1:448–49; and J. Mateos, ed., *Le typicon de la Grande Église*, 2 vols., *OCA* 165 (Rome, 1962), 1:55.

7 L. Cheikhō, *al-Naṣrāniyya wa-ādābuhā bayna ʿarab al-ḡābiliyya*, 2 vols. (Beirut, 1910; repr. Beirut, 1989), 2:215, connected but did not extensively discuss two important Arabic testimonies to the Kalends' medieval celebration—those of al-Mas'ūdī and al-Bīrūnī, which I

Nevertheless, and though it was never his primary aim, Idris laid the groundwork for a systematic investigation into the Kalends' continued celebration in the eastern half of the Islamic world. Unfortunately, such an investigation never materialized and Idris's initial effort has gone virtually unrecognized.¹⁰ The present article will correct this oversight.

now Libya never refer to the Kalends, routinely recording the day and month but with a different formula: see R. Bartoccini and D. Mazzoleni, "Le iscrizioni del cimitero di En Ngila," *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 53 (1977): 157–98.

All that said, Idris's identification of al-Qābisī's *al-NBD'S* as a reference to the Kalends is, in my view, improbable and cannot be considered conclusive in the absence of medieval North African parallels for the sound changes he proposes. Indeed, in a later publication (H. R. Idris, *La Berbérie orientale sous les Zirides X^e–XII^e siècles*, 2 vols. [Paris, 1962], 2:762) he acknowledged the phonological critiques offered by several colleagues and reported their alternative proposals for the word's interpretation—Candlemas or Advent, among other holidays. In turn, Ahwānī (*al-Tarbiya fī l-islām*, 154, n. 3 [Arabic], 144, n. 458 [French]) proposed the Jewish holiday of Sukkot. Sato, "Yannayr and *al-Anšara*," 13, n. 46, brought to light but did not further probe an indirect textual witness to the passage from al-Qābisī provided by a quotation in the legal compendium of the Mālikī jurist al-Burzulī (d. 1438), *Ġāmi' al-masā'il li-mā nazal min al-qaḍāyā bi-l-muftīn wa-l-ḥukkām*, in *Fatāwā l-Burzulī*, ed. M. al-Ḥabīb al-Hilā, 7 vols. (Beirut, 2002), 3:573. The manuscripts of this work present *al-YTD'S* and *al-NBW'S* (in the first instance) and *al-andalus* (in the second instance) as alternate readings for the *al-NBD'S* of the direct tradition, along with other divergences that affect the passage's brief description of the festival's customs. Perhaps significantly, al-Burzulī's commentary on the al-Qābisī passage mentions *yannayr* and presents it as a Tunisi holiday wholly distinct from *al-NBD'S* or whatever word stood in the text of al-Qābisī that he had before him. For the broader socioreligious context of al-Qābisī's discussion of gift giving and other forms of participation in non-Muslim holidays, see M. A. Handley, "Disputing the End of African Christianity," in *Vandals, Romans, and Berbers: New Perspectives on Late Antique North Africa*, ed. A. H. Merrill (Aldershot, 2004), 291–310 at 303–4, and M. Talbi, "Le Christianisme maghrébin de la conquête musulmane à sa disparition: Une tentative d'explication," in *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. M. Gervers and R. J. Bikhazi (Toronto, 1990), 313–51 at 319–27.

¹⁰ R. Lim, "Kalends of January," in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, ed. G. W. Bowersock, P. Brown, and O. Grabar (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 532, briefly acknowledges Idris's eastern evidence. In their annotations, several of the editors and translators of the Arabic texts I will treat note one or more parallel testimonies—independently of Cheikho, al-Ālūsī, and Idris, it would seem: A. Miquel, trans., *Aḥsan at-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm* (*La meilleure répartition pour la connaissance des provinces*, by Al-Muqaddasī [Damascus, 1963], 224, n. 53; Y. Ḥabbī, ed., *Kitāb al-dalā'il*, by Bar Bahlul [Ibn Bahlūl]

I will document the celebration of the Kalends of January in the Islamic East through at least 1000 CE by mustering a diverse collection of Arabic, Greek, Syriac, and Christian Palestinian Aramaic evidence. Geographically, this will be a story of remarkable breadth, taking us from the streets of Antioch to the hallways of the caliph's palace in Baghdad to the shores of the Aral Sea, encompassing lands that never knew Roman rule. Socially, the story will be narrower. It was Aramaic- and later Arabic-speaking Chalcedonian Christians, apparently Dyothelite Chalcedonians or "Melkites"¹¹ in particular, who preserved the Kalends' celebration. Still, I will also document participation by Muslims and even perhaps by Byzantine Greek émigrés. Throughout this survey, we will observe considerable continuity in the festival's customs between late antiquity and the Islamic Middle Ages. At the same time, we will catch glimpses of its changing social significance. Whereas in Roman late antiquity and in medieval Byzantium the Kalends were and remained a markedly secular festival, I will document a gradual Christian "sacralization" of this folk holiday in the medieval Islamic world. I will cautiously argue that as Melkite Christians became increasingly a social and numeric minority population, the Kalends took on new, unexpected meaning as an expression of Melkite identity.

The first two sections of this article are introductory. In section 1 I will provide a survey of pre-Islamic eastern Mediterranean Kalends customs and their social significance. In section 2 I will introduce the marginal appearance of "Kalends" as a calendrical

(Kuwait, 1987), 117, n. 21; and, collecting a sizable number, M. 'Aw-wād, ed., *Rusūm dār al-ḥilāfa*, by Abū l-Ḥasan Hilāl ibn al-Muḥassin al-Ṣābi' (Baghdad, 1964; repr. Beirut, 1986), 24, n. 5.

¹¹ In Syriac *malikāyē* and in Arabic *malikiyya* refer literally to "royalists," "members of the party of the king" (= Byzantine emperor or βασιλεύς). Although "Melkite" was initially a term used by their theological adversaries, Arabic-speaking Dyothelite Chalcedonian Orthodox Christians did come to self-identify as Melkites. On Melkite identity-building see S. H. Griffith, "The Church of Jerusalem and the 'Melkites': The Making of an 'Arab Orthodox' Christian Identity in the World of Islam (750–1050 CE)," in *Christians and Christianity in the Holy Land: From the Origins to the Latin Kingdoms*, ed. O. Limor and G. G. Stroumsa, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages 5 (Turnhout, 2006), 175–204, to be supplemented now by A. Treiger, "Unpublished Texts from the Arab Orthodox Tradition (1): On the Origin of the Term 'Melkite' and On the Destruction of the Maryamiyya Cathedral in Damascus," *Chronos: Revue d'Histoire de l'Université de Balamand* 29 (2014): 7–37.

abstraction in medieval Near Eastern sources in order to distinguish such instances from testimonies to the festival's celebration. Having dispensed with these preliminary matters, I will examine the evidence for the celebration of the Kalends in the formerly Roman eastern Mediterranean (section 3) and beyond, in Iraq and Central Asia (section 4), demonstrating continuity of custom but also change in the form of the festival's sacralization. Section 5 will turn to a more radical form of sacralization, as some Melkites came to deploy the name of the Kalends to refer instead to the feast of the Theophany on 6 January. Section 6 will tentatively assign the Kalends' obsolescence in eastern Islamic lands to the period from 1000 to 1300 CE and, finally, section 7 will highlight my study's broader social historical conclusions.

1. Setting the Stage:

The Kalends in the Pre-Islamic Eastern Mediterranean (Fourth–Seventh Centuries CE)

Before investigating the continued celebration of the Kalends in Islamic lands formerly part of the Eastern Roman Empire, we must briefly review the nature of the festival and its celebration in the late ancient Roman period itself. This section will concentrate on sources from Syria—namely Antioch and its environs, since this is precisely the region that our first group of Islamic-era sources on the Kalends' celebration will address in section 3. An analysis of these Roman-era sources' attitudes toward the Kalends and the social historical information that they provide will set the stage for my discussion of continuity and change in the festival's observance in the Islamic world.

Across the late ancient Roman world, the Kalends were a focus of what we might call a culture war between pagan and Christian intellectuals, and late ancient Roman Antioch and its environs were no exception.¹² Near the end of his life in 363 CE, the

conservative pagan orator and Antiochene intellectual Libanius addressed his pupils with an oration in praise of the Kalends.¹³ Some years later, between 387 and 398, the Antiochene priest and later archbishop John Chrysostom composed a sermon denouncing the festival, chiding his flock for neglecting church on the previous Sunday, 1 January, in favor of the Kalends' heathenish debauches.¹⁴ Chrysostom may have been indirectly responding to Libanius's oration; a more direct response came in 400 in a similar homily by Asterius, who served as bishop of Amaseia in northern Anatolia but who probably spent his formative years in Antioch.¹⁵

Though all three intellectuals describe the Kalends in ways that suit their own polemical purposes, we may nevertheless glean important social historical details about the festival's popular celebration in Antioch and that city's environs from their descriptions. The first of January remained its focal point, but the festivities continued through 3 January, with publicly sponsored chariot races and other entertainments, and into 4 and 5 January, when they tapered off.¹⁶ The public square or marketplace (*agorā*) saw riotous processions,¹⁷ with feasting and carousing¹⁸ and

13 Libanius, *Or.* 9. Further evidence on the Kalends from Libanius's pen appears in his earlier Προγύμνασμα περὶ καλανδῶν, *Prog.* 12.5.

14 John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Kalendas* 1 (PG 48:953–62). On the dating see Graf, *Roman Festivals*, 134.

15 Asterius, *Hom.* 4, in *Asterius of Amasea, Homilies I–XIV: Text, Introduction, and Notes*, ed. C. Datema (Leiden, 1970), 39–43; for an English translation see Asterius, *Ancient Sermons for Modern Times*, trans. G. Anderson and E. J. Goodspeed (New York, 1904), 111–29. On the date of the Asterius's sermon see Datema in *Asterius of Amasea*, xvii–xxv, 228–29. On the bishop's probable Antiochene connection, see *ibid.*, xix–xx. Kaldellis, “The Kalends in Byzantium,” 190, suggests tentatively that Asterius's text might be no real sermon at all but rather an intertextual rhetorical exercise aimed at refuting Libanius.

16 On the races see Libanius, *Prog.* 12.5.13, and see also Graf, *Roman Festivals*, 132–33. For more on public expenditure on entertainments, see Asterius, *Hom.* 4.7. Libanius, *Prog.* 12.5.14, describes the “blunting” of people's merriment on the fourth and fifth days as they realize they must soon return to work.

17 John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Kalendas* 1 (PG 48:954); Asterius, *Hom.* 4.7.2. The *agorā* was decorated for the occasion: John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Kalendas* 1, PG 48:954.

18 Libanius, *Prog.* 12.5.9.5–9 (of the eve of 1 January), 12.5.12 (of the domestic celebrations on 2 January); Libanius, *Or.* 9.6.1–7.6; John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Kalendas* 2 (PG 48:954; to ensure good fortune for the coming year).

12 On the controversy see especially Graf, *Roman Festivals*, 128–52. For contrasting examples, at the textual level, of Christian adoption of pagan festivals' literary associations, see B. MacDougall, “Spectatorship in City and Church in Late Antiquity: Theoria Returns to the Festival,” in *From Constantinople to the Frontier: The City and the Cities*, ed. N. Matheou, T. Kampianaki, and L. Bondioli (Leiden, 2016), 127–41. On the late ancient intellectual struggle between Christians and pagans more generally, well-attested especially at Antioch, see E. J. Watts, *The Final Pagan Generation* (Oakland, 2015).

the lighting of torches.¹⁹ Members of different social classes exchanged presents, while teachers and perhaps other professionals could expect special remuneration.²⁰ Children and even some adults trouped from door to door to impart the season's greetings, sing songs, and exchange token gifts for more expensive ones.²¹ The Kalends included a touch of the carnivalesque: soldiers cross-dressed and openly mocked the government, while some participants in the processions at Antioch appear to have worn masks or other disguises.²² Although the polemic of Chrysostom and other writers stresses the pagan nature of the Kalends, there is no evidence that the festival's Christian participants themselves felt they were worshipping the gods or otherwise being un-Christian.²³ Despite the suspicion with which church authorities viewed them and the sacrifices that had once accompanied them, the late ancient Kalends were a secular festival rather than a pagan holy period. In the fourth and early fifth centuries at least, the Kalends were still very much the start of the popular new year, an inaugural period whose celebration ensured good fortune in the year to come.²⁴

19 Libanius, *Prog.* 12.5.7.6 (of the predawn hours on 1 January); John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Kalendas* 3 (PG 48:956–57).

20 Asterius, *Hom.* 4.4.1–3; Libanius, *Prog.* 12.5.5, 9–10; Libanius, *Or.* 9.8.1–9.9.5. Libanius mentions the special gift for teachers at *Or.* 9.16.

21 Asterius, *Hom.* 4.4.4–5; 4.6. The adults described by Libanius, *Prog.* 12.5.6, seem more intent on trick than on treat. Note especially his mention of “songs” (ᾠδαίς). The doors may have been garlanded: see, e.g., John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Kalendas* 3 (PG 48:957).

22 For the actions of soldiers see Asterius, *Hom.* 4.7. Chrysostom's reference at *Hom. in Kalendas* 1 (PG 48:954) to “demons on parade in the *agorā*” (δαίμόνων πομπευσάντων ἐπὶ τῆς ἀγορᾶς) has been interpreted by R. Arbesmann (“The ‘Cervuli’ and ‘Anniculae’ in Caesarius of Arles,” *Traditio* 25 [1979]: 89–119 at 114), by Harris (*Sacred Folly* [n. 4 above], 14), and by Graf (*Roman Festivals*, 135–36) as a description of the masks and other disguises attested in roughly contemporaneous western sources as well as in later Byzantine sources, reviewed below.

23 See especially the discussions of Grig, “Interpreting the Kalends of January” (n. 3 above), 243–53, and Harris, *Sacred Folly*, 18–20. Asterius, *Hom.* 4.2.3, in fact mocks the Kalends as a festival without any purpose or clear origin, suggesting no religious intention on the part of those who celebrated it. On the tendentious anachronism of Libanius's claims for a religiously inflected pagan Kalends, see Kaldellis, “The Kalends in Byzantium,” 190, and see also Graf, *Roman Festivals*, 131–32. The “great divinity” (δαίμονος . . . μεγάλου) whom Libanius mentions at *Or.* 9.1.5—though conceivably Zeus/Jupiter—may in fact be the emperor: see Graf, *Roman Festivals*, 133.

24 John Chrysostom, *Hom. in Kalendas* 2 (PG 48:954).

The Kalends continued in Constantinople and the Byzantine Near East in the ensuing centuries. By the fifth and sixth centuries, the emperor himself rewarded public officials on 1 January as part of the Kalends celebrations and, in keeping with fourth-century practice, craftsmen and other professionals received a bonus as well.²⁵ Mummery was still practiced on the Kalends in sixth-century Anatolia.²⁶ Indeed, the festival—replete with its masks, cross-dressing, and exuberant dances—surely continued in force up to the Islamic conquest. Several decades later, behind Byzantine lines, the council in Trullo went out of its way to describe these Kalends practices and—ineffectually, as Kaldellis has shown—to ban them.²⁷

Let us conclude our survey of the pre-Islamic Kalends by considering the secular festival's connection, as made by late ancient Christian sources, with the feast of the Theophany celebrated on 6 January to commemorate Christ's baptism. Because the festivities of the Kalends extended through 5 January and because the vigil of the Theophany was celebrated on the evening of 5 January, the secular feast was inconveniently close to the sacred one. In fact, they could even be said to coincide. Asterius, who preached his homily on the day of the Theophany, makes this quite clear with his opening words:

Yesterday and today, two festivals coincided, festivals not only unrelated and discordant, but wholly adverse and hostile to each other. One is of the rabble outside, gathering, in large sums, the money of mammon and bringing in its train other sorts of petty traffic fit for the *agorā* and stamped with vulgarity. The other is of holy and

25 See *Codex Justinianus* 2.7.23, 12.19.14, in *Corpus Iuris Civilis*, ed. P. Krueger, vol. 2 (Berlin, 1877), and *Basilika* B XX.4.27 = D XIX.5.27 in *Basilicorum libri LX*, ser. A, vol. 1, *Textus librorum I–VIII*, ed. J. H. Scheltema and N. van der Wal (Groningen, 1955), with the discussion of Graf, *Roman Festivals*, 224.

26 John Lydus, *De mensibus* 4.2.15–19, describes masked processions on the Kalends in western Anatolia's Philadelphia (modern Alaşehir), which he interprets, in typically antiquarian fashion, as representing Janus and Saturn/Kronos.

27 Canon 62, in 692 CE: for the text, see *The Council in Trullo Revisited*, ed. G. Nedungatt and M. Featherstone (Rome, 1995), 142–44, with the commentary of Kaldellis, “The Kalends in Byzantium,” 192–94.

true religion, inculcating acquaintance with God, and the virtue of the purified life.²⁸

Gregory of Nyssa (d. after 394), preaching in central Anatolia, also uses his sermon on the Theophany and its baptismal associations to remark that worldly affairs had recently kept his flock from church the previous Sunday, without naming the Kalends directly.²⁹ It will be important to keep this overlap and association between the secular festival of the Kalends and the sacred feast of the Theophany in mind as we turn to our Islamic-era sources.

2. A Preliminary Clarification: “Kalends” as a Calendrical Term in Syriac and Arabic Sources

Before we examine the evidence for the continued celebration of the Kalends in the medieval Islamic world, a clarification on the nature of our sources is in order. This article’s later sections will treat only those references to the Kalends of January in medieval Near Eastern sources that can be read as a testimony to the festival’s continued celebration. Excluded from review will be texts that simply define or otherwise describe the Kalends as a calendrical abstraction without any indication that the author is speaking of a living festival. However, as we will see in section 4, this abstract calendrical knowledge may influence how at least one of our sources, al-Bīrūnī, speaks of the Kalends festival. In another instance, discussed in section 6, Hady Roger Idris has mistaken such calendrical lore as a testimony to the celebration of the festival itself. Therefore, this section provides a representative but not exhaustive review of this wider, abstract understanding of the Kalends as they appear in Syriac and Arabic sources.

28 Asterius, *Hom.* 4.1.1: Δύο κατὰ ταῦτόν ἐορταί συνέδραμον ἐπὶ τῆς χθιζῆς καὶ τῆς ἐνεστῶσης ἡμέρας, οὐ συμφωνοί τε καὶ ἀδελφοί, πᾶν δὲ τούναντίον ἐχθρῶς τε καὶ ἐναντίως ἔχουσιν πρὸς ἀλλήλους. Ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἐστὶν τοῦ ἔξωθεν συρφετοῦ, πολὺ συνάγουσα τοῦ μαμωνᾶ τὸ ἀργύριον καὶ τὴν ἄλλην καπηλείαν ἐφέλκομένη, τὴν ἀγοραίων τε καὶ <ἀν>ελεύθερον· ἡ δὲ τῆς ἀγίας καὶ ἀληθοῦς θρησκείας, οἰκείωσιν τὴν πρὸς Θεὸν καὶ τοῦ κεκαθαρμένου βίου τὴν ἀρετὴν ἐκπαιδεύουσα. I quote with modifications the translation of Anderson and Goodspeed, *Ancient Sermons*, 113.

29 Gregory of Nyssa, *In diem luminum*, in *Gregorii Nysseni opera*, ed. E. Gebhardt, vol. 9 (Leiden, 1967), 221. See the discussion of Datema in Asterius, *Asterius of Amasea*, 228–29.

Discussions of the Kalends as a calendrical abstraction are not common in medieval Near Eastern sources, but they do occur. Medieval Syriac-Arabic lexica, such as those by the East-Syrians³⁰ Bar ‘Ali (fl. second half of the ninth century) and Bar Bahlul (fl. mid-tenth century), recognize the original meaning of “kalends” as the first day of any month in the ancient Roman system of kalends, nones, and ides.³¹ Yet the lexicographers are more inclined to define the Kalends (generally *QLNDS*, *QLNDYS*, or *al-QLND’S*)³² as variously “the New Year’s Day of the Greeks (*yawnāyē*, *al-yūnān*)” or “the New Year’s Day of the Romans/Byzantines (*al-rūm*),” noting that this day is 1 January.³³ This second understanding

30 By “East-Syrians” I mean members of the Church of the East—i.e., “Nestorians.” On the nomenclature see S. P. Brock, “The ‘Nestorian’ Church: A Lamentable Misnomer,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 78.3 (1996): 23–35.

31 See most readily the collection of the various lexica’s entries in R. Payne-Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1879–1901), 2:3636.

32 Since the vocalization is not certain, I will throughout this article transliterate only the consonantal shell of the various Syriac, Arabic, and Christian Palestinian Aramaic iterations of “Kalends,” presenting the shell in block capitals. To distinguish them from the shell, I will present the Arabic definite article *al-*, Arabic case endings, and the Aramaic emphatic marker *-ā* in lowercase. The Syriac and Arabic forms ending in a final sibilant may reflect the accusative form *Καλάνδας*. Alternatively, they may be influenced by the early medieval spoken Greek first declension plural termination *-ες*, which replaced *-αι* sometime after 500 CE and which is familiar from modern Greek: see R. Browning, *Medieval and Modern Greek* (Cambridge, 1983), 60. Assuming Syriac (or spoken Aramaic more generally) as an intermediary for the Arabic, the latter is possible: see A. Butts, *Language Change in the Wake of Empire: Syriac in Its Graeco-Roman Context* (Winona Lake, IN, 2016), 61–63. The variation between *-S*, *-YS* and *-’S* cannot definitively help us determine the underlying Greek form: see Butts, *Language Change*, 91, for the numerous, overlapping ways that Syriac represents *α* and *ε*. Though not present in the medieval Syriac-Arabic lexica, other forms of the word “Kalends” influenced by the Greek genitive do occur in Syriac literature: see Payne-Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 2:3636. M. Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon* (Winona Lake, IN–Piscataway, NJ, 2009), does not include an entry for our word.

33 Payne-Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, 2:3636. The spelling *QLYDYS* and the false etymology occasionally provided in some manuscripts containing Bar Bahlul’s work whereby the term *Kalends* is said to mean “key” (*miftāḥ*), as if from Greek *κλείς* (accusative *κλείδα* > Syriac *qlidā*), seems inspired by this understanding. The day of the Kalends “opens” the month or year to follow. See Bar Bahlul, *Lexicon*, in *Lexicon Syriacum auctore Hassano Bar-Bahlule*, ed. R. Duval, 3 vols. (Paris, 1888–1901), 3:1793–94. Bar Bahlul, as he often does, provides an earlier source for his definition of the Kalends as the New Year’s Day of the Greeks (*yawnāyē*, *al-yūnān*): namely, one Zacharias, identified

reflects the old function of the Kalends of January as the Roman New Year's Day—a fact that became fossilized in East-Syrian Christian lore even after the Byzantines had long since adopted 1 September as the start of the civil and ecclesiastical New Year.

In turn, some trace of this calendrical lore was accessible to Muslim scientists writing in Arabic. Thus al-Bīrūnī (d. ca. 1048) twice reports that 1 January is called the Kalends (*QLND'S*) and serves as New Year's Day for the Romans or Byzantines (*al-rūm*), again ignoring the reality of the contemporary Byzantine calendar.³⁴ The conduit for such knowledge among Muslims must have been Syriac Christian scholars, but there is at least one possible exception. Ibn Waḥṣiyya's *al-Filāḥ al-nabaṭiyya*, composed between 903/4 and 930/31, includes a reference to "the day of the Kalends" (*yawm al-QLNDS*), perhaps held over from one of the Greek agricultural treatises that sometimes lie behind that work's pagan Aramaic source material.³⁵

by Duval, *Lexicon*, 1:iii, xx, xiv, as Zacharias of Marw (fl. second half of the ninth century).

34 al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb al-āṭār al-bāqiya 'an al-qurūn al-hāliya*, in *Chronologie orientalischen Völker von Albérūnī*, ed. E. Sachau (Leipzig, 1878), 292, 316; for an English translation see *The Chronology of Ancient Nations*, trans. E. Sachau (London, 1879), 288, 314. Sachau provides the misleading translation "calendar of the Greeks." In the second instance, al-Bīrūnī is explicitly drawing on a lost work by Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Hāsimī, so conceivably the comparison of this alternate date for the Ḥarrānian Šābian New Year to the Roman Kalends of January was made by that author rather than by al-Bīrūnī himself. The first instance is a report on the Kalends as actually celebrated by a Melkite community known to al-Bīrūnī: see section 4 below. Al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb al-taḥḥīm li-awā'il šinā'at al-tanḡīm*, in *The Book of Instruction in the Elements the Art of Astrology*, ed. and trans. R. R. Wright (London, 1934), 274, notes that 1 January marks the start of the Roman year without labeling it the Kalends.

35 Ibn Waḥṣiyya, *Kitāb al-filāḥ al-nabaṭiyya*, ed. T. Fahd, 3 vols. (Damascus, 1993–98), 1:498. Alternatively, the Kalends may simply have had some currency as a calendrical term among the late ancient Kasdānī Aramaeans whose Aramaic sources Ibn Waḥṣiyya adapted into Arabic. On these materials see J. Hämeen-Anttila, *The Last Pagans of Iraq: Ibn Waḥṣiyya and His "Nabataean Agriculture"* (Leiden, 2006), 3–80. A third explanation is that the festival of the Kalends was observed at some point in the late ancient period by the Kasdānī Aramaean religious community. We might note that the day of the Kalends is cited in a passage attributed to the Aramaean sage Yanbūšād as a particularly favorable time to sow fava bean plants and is part of the sage's refutation of those Aramaean pagans who forbade eating fava beans—a religious context. The first of the luni-solar month Kānūn II (roughly 1 January) was one possible start of the new year for the closely related sect of Ḥarrānian Šābians, and we find traces of New Year's Eve rituals on the eve of the twenty-fourth

All in all, this abstract understanding of the Kalends as a calendrical term makes exceedingly few appearances in medieval Syriac and even fewer in Arabic literature. For our purposes, this relative scarcity is a good thing. It ensures that the references to the Kalends as a living festival in the mostly Arabic sources to which I now turn almost certainly reflect contemporary usage. In other words, they are not likely to result from an author's antiquarian application of "Kalends" to some contemporary practice, because that term had little currency for writers and their readers in the medieval Islamic world at large.³⁶ Equipped with this background information, let us now turn to our testimonies for the celebration of the Kalends.

3. Celebration of the Kalends in Islamic Syria, Palestine, and Egypt (Eighth–Tenth Centuries CE)

As we saw above in section 1, Greek sources attest the continued celebration of the Kalends in the Roman Near East up to and following the fifth century. This section will draw on Syriac and Arabic sources to demonstrate an uninterrupted and remarkably conservative continuity in the Kalends' celebration—centuries after the end of Roman rule—in Syria, in Palestine, and even apparently in Egypt. Celebration of the festival remained strongest and most formalized among Melkite Christians, but Muslims and perhaps other Christians too took casual notice of the holiday. In contrast to its treatment during Roman late antiquity, we witness a gradual sacralization of Kalends on the part of Melkites, who incorporated the festival into their liturgical year with the apparent approval of their ecclesiastical authorities.

Indirect evidence for the continued celebration of the Kalends in early eighth-century Syria comes from a letter written in 714 by the Syriac Orthodox

of Kānūn I (roughly 24 December) for the Kasdānīs: see Hämeen-Anttila, *The Last Pagans of Iraq*, 200–203, and C. Connelly, "The Pagan Origin of Christmas According to 'Abd al-Jabbār's *Taḥbīb*," *Der Islam* 96.1 (2019): 10–41 at 22–26. On the taboo against fava beans among late ancient and early medieval pagan Aramaean groups, see K. van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes: From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science* (Oxford, 2009), 96–97, n. 144.

36 One might contrast the frequency with which the seasonal Persian festivals of Mehragān (Arabic *mihraḡān*) and Nowruz (Arabic *nayrūz*) are discussed in Arabic sources and hence semantically generalized across the Islamic world.

author George, bishop of the Arab tribes (d. 724).³⁷ Addressing a number of calendrical topics, George has occasion to remark that the ancient Romans (*romāyē*) celebrated a holiday on 1 March and that certain “Greeks” (*yawnāyē*)—by which he may mean Chalcedonian Christians—continued its celebration even in his day “here in Syria” (*harkā b-suryā*). Taken by itself, George’s reference hardly constitutes evidence for the Kalends in early eighth-century Syria. However, a late ancient Roman “festival on 1 March” is one of several additional holidays that the council in Trullo had associated with the Kalends in its attempt to ban that festival only two decades earlier in 692.³⁸ Indeed, George mentions that to celebrate the 1 March festival his Syrian “Greeks” cross-dress (*lābsīn lbušē d-neššē*)—one of the forbidden activities that the council in Trullo appears to connect with both 1 March and the January Kalends.³⁹ If certain inhabitants of Syria were celebrating the 1 March festival and carrying on its late ancient customs, then they likely continued to celebrate the closely related Kalends of January as well. In fact, George—whose own community evidently did not celebrate the holiday—may even be confusing the customs of the 1 March festival with those of the Kalends. He mentions that these Syrian “Greeks” go from house to house to beg for food and drink on 1 March—a custom that, as we saw in section 1, was connected in late ancient

sources exclusively with the January Kalends.⁴⁰ When describing the alleged Roman origin of the 1 March festival, George does in fact have occasion to mention, in passing, the start of January and its significance as the Roman New Year’s Day (*rēš šattā d-romāyē*).⁴¹ All in

40 George, bishop of the Arab tribes, *Letter 7*, 6 (trans. 113): *w-metkarkin b-battē w-hādrin l-hon uklā w-seqyā*. He also mentions that festival-goers deck their clothing with bells (*tāleym b-hon zagge*).

41 George, bishop of the Arab tribes, *Letter 7*, 7 (trans. 114). To the extent that the 1 March festival may dimly reflect the Roman Matronalia, George is correct to note its ancient Roman origin: see Graf, *Roman Festivals* (n. 2 above), 215–16. That said, his story of an unnamed Roman king’s institution of horse racing on 1 March is clearly an abbreviated retelling of the legend of Romulus’s founding of the 1 March festival and circus races. This legend is best known to modern scholars from John Malalas, *Chronographia* 7.3–5—on which see now Graf, *Roman Festivals*, 188–89—and repeated from Malalas in the later Greek chronographic tradition. This Romulus narrative, together with much else of the legendary Roman material appearing in Malalas, *Chronographia*, 7.1–7, was in fact well-known to later Syriac and Christian Arabic authors, appearing in the chronicle fragment attributed to a Diocles—Pseudo-Diocles of Peparethus?—in *Analecta syriaca*, ed. P. de Lagarde (Leipzig, 1858), 201–5 (Syriac text, ed. based on one of the extant MSS) = *Chronica minora* (Syr. III, 4), T, ed. I. Guidi CSCO 5, SS 5 (Paris, 1905; repr. Leuven, 1971), 361–70 (Syriac text, ed. based on two of the extant MSS); translated into Latin in *Chronica minora* (Syr. III, 4), V, ed. I. Guidi, CSCO 6, SS 6 (Paris, 1907; repr. Leuven, 1960), 285–95; translated into English (from de Lagarde’s edition) in B. H. Cowper, *Syriac Miscellanies; or Extracts Relating to the First and Second General Councils, and Various Other Quotations, Theological, Historical, and Classical* (London, 1861), and in I. H. Hall, “13. Some Syriac Legends,” *TAPA* 21 (1889): xxix–xxxiii. It also appears in Agapius of Hierapolis (Mahbūb al-Manbiḡi), *Kitāb al-unwān* (so conventionally called), in *Kitāb al-unwān, Histoire universelle . . .*, ed. A. Vasiliev, part 1, fasc. 2, PO 11 (Paris, 1915), 52–54 [190–92]; in the *Chronicon ad annum 1234*, in *Chronicon anonymi auctoris ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens* (Syr. III, 14), T, ed. I. A. Barsoum and J.-B. Chabot, 2 vols., CSCO 81, SS 36 (Leuven, 1920), 1:110 (Syriac text), translated into Latin in *Chronicon anonymi auctoris ad annum Christi 1234 pertinens* (Syr. III, 14), V, trans. J.-B. Chabot, CSCO 109, SS 56 (Leuven, 1937), 86–87; in Michael the Syrian in *Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche jacobite d’Antioche (1166–1199)*, ed. J.-B. Chabot, 4 vols. (Paris, 1899–1910), 4:49–51 (Syriac text), translated into French in 1:80–85; and via a Christian Arabic source in al-Bīrūnī, *Kitāb tabqīq mā li-l-hind min maqūla maqbūla fi-l-‘aql aw mardūla*, ed. E. Sachau (London, 1887), 54, translated into English in *Al-Bīrūnī’s India, an Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030*, trans. E. Sachau, 2 vols. (London, 1888), 1:112.

Unlike the brief account in George’s letter, all of these versions of the Romulus legend exhibit clear textual similarities with Malalas’s report. Some of these parallels were noted already by B. H. Cowper, “Recent Syriac Literature,” *Journal of Sacred Literature and Biblical Record* 10.20 (1860): 373–85 at 385; by A. Baumstark, “Orientalische

37 George, bishop of the Arab tribes, *Letter 7*, in V. Ryssel, ed., “Die astronomischen Briefe Georgs des Araberbischofs,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Verwandte Gebiete* 8 (1893): 1–55 at 6–7 (Syriac text); translated into German in *Georgs des Araberbischofs: Gedichte und Briefe*, trans. V. Ryssel (Leipzig, 1891), 113–14; all references to this letter and its translation are to these editions. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* who drew my attention to this evidence and who shared an unpublished Syriac transcription and English translation of the relevant passage from London, British Library, add. 2.154, fols. 265b–266a. On George’s biography and milieu, see now J. Tannous, “Between Christology and *Kalām*? The Life and Letters of George, Bishop of the Arab Tribes,” in *Malphono w-Rabo d-Malphone: Studies in Honor of Sebastian P. Brock*, ed. G. Kiraz (Piscataway, NJ, 2008), 671–716.

38 Council in Trullo, Canon 62, in Nedungatt and Featherstone, *The Council in Trullo Revisited*, 142, calls this 1 March holiday simply “the festival celebrated on the first day of the month of March” (τὴν ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ τοῦ μαρτίου μηνὸς ἡμέρα ἐπιτελουμένην πανήγυριν).

39 George, bishop of the Arab tribes, *Letter 7*, 6 (trans. 113); Council in Trullo, Canon 62, in Nedungatt and Featherstone, *The Council in Trullo Revisited*, 143: . . . ὁρίζοντες, μηδένα ἀνδρα γυναικεῖαν στολὴν ἐνδιδύσκεισθαι, ἢ γυναῖκα τὴν ἀνδράσιν ἀρμόδιον.

all, George's reference to the festivities of 1 March provides suggestive, if circumstantial, evidence for the continued celebration of the Kalends of January in Syria during the first Islamic century.

It is not until the tenth century that our Near Eastern sources unambiguously attest to the Kalends' continued celebration. Writing between 943 and 947,⁴² the Muslim historian al-Ma'sūdī describes the Kalends as a Christian festival with both overtly religious and more distinctly secular elements. This account occurs in a chapter of al-Ma'sūdī's *Murūğ al-dahab wa-ma'ādin al-ğawhar* devoted to the Julian calendar and its Syro-Macedonian months (*šuhūr al-suryāniyyīn*):

Kānūn II [January] has thirty-one days. Its first day is the Kalends (*al-QLNDS*). On this day, in Syria-Palestine (*al-šām*), that region's people have a festival (*ʿid*) on whose eve they kindle lights and, principally in the city of Antioch, display what they call the blessed sacrament in

the Church of *al-Qusyān*.⁴³ So it is too in the rest of Syria-Palestine, in Jerusalem, in Egypt, and throughout the land of the Christians. As for the Antiochene Christians⁴⁴ merrymaking and gaiety, their kindling of lights, and their preparation of various foods and drinks—many of the common folk assist them in those activities as do many of the elites. For it is in the city of Antioch that the see of the patriarch widely revered among them according to their religion is located, and indeed the Christians call Antioch the City of God, calling it likewise the City of the King and the Mother of Cities because it was there that Christianity first appeared.⁴⁵

Rombeschreibungen," *OC* 1 (1901): 382–87 at 383; and by J. Tannous, "Romanness in the Syriac East," in *Transformations of Romanness: Early Medieval Regions and Identities*, ed. W. Pohl, C. Gantner, C. Grifoni, and M. Pollheimer-Mohaupt (Berlin, 2018), 457–80 at 472–73. However, the precise relationship between these texts, especially as regards the narrative material present in Pseudo-Diocles but not in the Greek recension of Malalas we possess, should be the subject of further investigation. M. Debié has argued plausibly that Pseudo-Diocles' account of the Romulus legend depends not on Malalas, even indirectly, but rather on a third source, common to both, that Malalas excerpted; see "Jean Malalas et la tradition chronographique de langue syriaque," in *Recherches sur la chronique de Jean Malalas, I, actes du colloque: La Chronique de Jean Malalas (VI^e s. è. Chr.) Genèse et transmission, 21–22 mars 2003, Aix-en-Provence*, ed. S. Agusta-Boularot, J. Beaucamp, A.-M. Bernardi, B. Cabouret, and E. Caire, Centre de Recherche et de Civilisation de Byzance, Monographies 15 (Paris, 2004), 147–164 at 150–55. She further noted discrepancies between part of Michael's account and that of Malalas. See now also M. Debié, *L'écriture de l'histoire en syriaque*, Late Antique History and Religion 12 (Leuven, 2015), 515–16. As preserved in all the Syriac and Arabic sources, the names of Romulus and Remus are, notably, not those given by Malalas—Rhōmos and Rhēmos—but something more like the Rhōmylos and Rhōmos found in earlier Graeco-Roman historiography and in turn transmitted in other Byzantine sources. On the question of Malalas's Syriac reception more generally, see M. Debié, *L'écriture de l'histoire*, 336–37; eadem, "Jean Malalas," 147–50, 155–64; and W. Witakowski, "Malalas in Syriac," in *Studies in John Malalas*, ed. E. Jeffreys, B. Croke, and R. Scott, ByzAus 6 (Sydney, 1990), 299–310.

42 The work was written in 943 and subsequently revised in 947 and 956. However, it is only the revision of 947 that survives: see with references C. Pellat, "al-Ma'sūdī," *EI*² (accessed via BrillOnline).

43 That is, the Church of Cassian (Κασσιανός), a principal church of late ancient and medieval Antioch; on which see H. N. Kennedy, "Antioch: From Byzantium to Islam and Back Again," in *The City in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Rich (London, 1992), 181–98 at 187–88, 190 (reprinted in his *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East* [Aldershot, 2006]), with the alternative proposals of W. Mayer and P. Allen, *The Churches of Syrian Antioch (300–638 CE)* (Leuven, 2012), 52–55.

44 In his revision and correction of Barbier de Meynard et Pavet de Courteille's translation of al-Ma'sūdī, *Les prairies d'or*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1962–71), §1290, C. Pellat understands *abl dīn al-naṣrāniyya* as specifically "le clergé chrétien" rather than the city's Christian population generally. This interpretation would, in turn, compel us to understand the common folk and elites mentioned next as being not the non-Christians of Antioch but rather the Christian laypeople. However, I argue that Pellat is mistaken here: one need look no further than al-Ma'sūdī, *Murūğ al-dahab* §§736, 1293, for instances in which *abl dīn al-naṣrāniyya* must mean simply "Christians" or "members of the Christian religion" and is so translated by Pellat. (But it should be noted that some MSS at §1293 have "*abl al-naṣrāniyya*" for "*abl dīn al-naṣrāniyya*"; unfortunately, there is still no critical edition of the *Murūğ al-dahab*.) Earlier translators—G. Le Strange, *Palestine under the Moslems: A Description of Syria and the Holy Land from A.D. 650 to 1500* (London, 1890), 367–68 (quite loose); B. de Meynard and P. de Courteille, *Les prairies d'or*, 7 vols. (Paris, 1861–77), 3:406—agree with my understanding of *abl dīn al-naṣrāniyya* as simply "Christians" at §1290.

45 al-Ma'sūdī, *Murūğ al-dahab wa-ma'ādin al-ğawhar*, ed. C. Pellat, §1290: *wa-kānūnu l-āḥīru aḥadun wa-talātūna yawman wa-awwalu yawmin minhu l-QLNDSu fa-yakūnu fībi bi-l-šāmi li-ablihi ʿidun yūqidūna fī laylatihi l-nīrāna wa-yuḥīrūna lā siyyamā bi-madinati anṭākiyata bi-mā yakūnu fī kanīṣati l-qusyāni bihā min l-quddāsi ʿindahum wa-ka-dālika bi-sāʾiri l-šāmi wa-bayti l-maqdisi wa-miṣra wa-arḍi l-naṣrāniyyati kullihā wa-mā yuḥīru ablu dīni l-naṣrāniyyati bi-anṭākiyata min l-faraḥi wa-l-surūri wa-iqādi l-nīrāni wa-l-māʾakili wa-l-mašārībi wa-yusāʾiduhum ʾalā dālika kaṭīrun min ʾawāmmi l-nāsi wa-kaṭīrun min ḥawāṣṣihim wa-dālika anna madīnata anṭākiyata bihā kursiyu l-baṭraki l-muʾaẓẓami*

There are some textual problems with the passage, but the meaning is more or less clear.⁴⁶ According to al-Mas'ūdī, Christians throughout the southeastern Mediterranean celebrate the Kalends with various festive activities immediately recognizable from our late ancient sources reviewed in section 1, principally feasting and the lighting of celebratory lights. He also claims that Christians in Christian territories—presumably Byzantium—celebrate the Kalends in this way, though this claim may simply be a rhetorical exaggeration on the historian's part. In mid-tenth-century Antioch, only a few years before its reconquest by the Byzantines, al-Mas'ūdī asserts that a major church holds a special Kalends mass. So prominent is the Antiochene Christians' ensuing carnival that non-Christians of all social classes partake in what we might call the secular aspects of the festival—or so al-Mas'ūdī appears to be saying.⁴⁷ While our Baghdad-born historian does not cite the source of his information, his account of the Kalends may be firsthand: al-Mas'ūdī visited Syria during his travels, in 918–26 and again in 946, stopping in the cities of Damascus and Antioch.⁴⁸ He also spent time in both Upper and Lower Egypt.⁴⁹ The Kalends evidently left an impression on al-Mas'ūdī, for he mentions them again in passing elsewhere.⁵⁰

A slightly later and clearly independent report corroborates and complements al-Mas'ūdī's account of the Kalends and their popular celebration. It comes from the geographer Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad

al-Muqaddasī (also called al-Maqdisī), writing between 985 and 990.⁵¹ As his *nisba* indicates, al-Muqaddasī hailed from Jerusalem (al-Bayt al-Muqaddas or Bayt al-Maqdis), and his *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm* contains a lengthy description and, in some ways, encomium of his native Syria-Palestine (*al-šām*). This description provides a moderately long list of “festivals of the Christians which Muslims recognize and use to determine the seasons,”⁵² including such major holidays as Easter, Pentecost, Christmas, and—crucially—the Kalends (*al-QLNDS*).⁵³ The Kalends is one of two holidays—the other being the feast of St. Barbara—for which al-Muqaddasī records “popular proverbs” (*amtāl al-nās*): “When the Kalends come,” the local saying goes, “keep warm and stay indoors.”⁵⁴ In other words, the Kalends signal the onset of cold weather. As a native of the region, al-Muqaddasī provides precious evidence that the Kalends were a popular festival that measured the rhythms of the solar year for Christians and Muslims alike, who both continued to deploy its ancient Roman name.

Given the locations mentioned by the sources reviewed above and given that the Kalends began as a festival of the Roman Empire, we might surmise that all Christian denominations that emerged in the Roman Near East—Melkites (Dyothelite Chalcedonians), Maronites (Monothelite Chalcedonians), and Miaphysites—continued their celebration. However, the available literary evidence suggests

⁴⁶ *indabum fī dīnīhim wa-anna l-našrāniyyata tusammī anṭākiyata madīnata llāhi wa-yusammūnahā ayḍan madīnata l-maliki wa-umma l-muduni li-anna bad' a zuḥūri l-našrāniyyati kāna fihā.*

⁴⁷ Here I follow Pellat's emendation of the *rubbamā yakūnu* and *wa-bi-mā yakūnu* of the manuscripts to *bi-mā yakūnu*. The sequence *wa-mā yuḏhiru . . . wa-yusā'idubum* also demonstrates mild inconcinnity. The sequence *wa-l-ma'ākil wa-l-mašārib* is not attested in every manuscript.

⁴⁸ See n. 44 above. The historian certainly does report limited Muslim participation in a Christian festival elsewhere in his calendar, at *Murūḡ al-ḡahab* §1288.

⁴⁹ See al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūḡ al-ḡahab* §3326; idem, *Kitāb al-tanbih wa-l-išrāf*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1894), 194; *Murūḡ al-ḡahab* §§704–5. See further Pellat, “al-Mas'ūdī,” *EI*².

⁵⁰ See al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūḡ al-ḡahab* §§ 679, 811–18, 822, 841, 893.

⁵¹ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūḡ al-ḡahab* §1297, where the context is his report on the Byzantine Greek (*rūmī*) names of the months. It is possible that his source for these names included a calendrical reference to the Kalends that he retained, but that occasioned him to comment that he had already treated the Kalends *qua* festival earlier.

⁵² See with references A. Miquel, “al-Muqaddasī,” *EI*² (accessed via BrillOnline).

⁵³ al-Muqaddasī, *Kitāb aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1906), 182: *wa-min a'yādi l-našārā llatī ya'rifūnahā l-muslimūna wa-yuqaddirūna bihā l-fuṣūla . . .* See also B. A. Collins, *The Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions* (Reading, 1994), 166.

⁵⁴ al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 182; trans. *Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions*, 166. Collins's “Feast” and “(first day of January)” are his own explanatory interpolations, not present in the Arabic.

⁵⁵ al-Muqaddasī, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 182–83: *wa-min amtālibihim idā ḡā'a l-QLNDSu fa-tadaffa' wa-ḥtabis*; trans. *Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions*, 166. I follow the uncontroversial emendation of Miquel (n. 10 above), *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm*, 224, n. 54. H. Dajani-Shakeel, “Natives and Franks in Palestine: Perceptions and Interaction,” in Gervers and Bikhazi, *Conversion and Continuity* (n. 9 above), 161–84 at 162, understands these as proverbs proper to Palestine (*Filasṭīn*)—plausibly, given al-Muqaddasī's native city. However, the geographer in fact presents them as shared by all of Syria-Palestine (*al-šām*).

that the celebration of Kalends was strongest among Chalcedonians, perhaps even specifically among Melkites. For his part, al-Mas'ūdī connects the Kalends with the patriarchal see of Melkite Antioch. Moreover, we have observed how the Syriac Orthodox Miaphysite George, bishop of the Arabs Tribes, attributes the celebration of the closely related 1 March festival to a group located in Syria yet foreign to him, whom he calls “Greeks” (*yawnāyē*). Rather than indicating ethnicity or language group, George’s label may well refer to Chalcedonians or, even more narrowly, to Melkites.⁵⁵ As their moniker (meaning “royalists”) suggests, Melkites bore a close association with Greek Byzantium and its emperor. That supposition finds confirmation in a brief report by the Iraqi Bar Bahlul in his *Kitāb al-dalā'il*, written between 942 and 968.⁵⁶ The East-Syrian Christian scholar lists the Kalends (*al-QLNDYS*) on the first of Kānūn II (January) under memorial feasts (*al-dakārīn*) celebrated during that month.⁵⁷ However, he states explicitly that this is a holiday “for the Melkites” (*li-l-malikiyya*): that is, not for other Christian denominations such as his own Church of the East. And Bar Bahlul does more than offer evidence for the festival’s predominantly Melkite celebration. Like al-Mas'ūdī, he hints at the Kalends’ sacralization and incorporation into the liturgical year. He defines the holiday as “the seven-day period of Mary” (*sābū' maryam*), suggesting that it had come to mark, at least for some Melkites, the octave of the Nativity—that is, the end of the week following Christmas.⁵⁸ While it is certainly possible

that some Maronites and Miaphysites continued to celebrate the Kalends without the festival’s being formally incorporated into their liturgical years, the available evidence points to Melkite observation alone.

Among Near Eastern Christians, then, the Kalends were celebrated predominantly or at least most formally by Melkites. In places such as Syria and Palestine where Melkites made up a substantial portion of the population, Muslims too participated in this seasonal holiday—or so al-Mas'ūdī and al-Muqaddasī seem to suggest. It is certainly likely that public celebration of the Kalends would have attracted Muslims’ attention and casual attendance in much the same way that other Christian festivals did throughout medieval Syria, Palestine, and elsewhere. The sources noted above are brief but nevertheless indicate a great deal of continuity in custom between the late ancient Kalends and their medieval successor. Yet we also glimpse, at least in al-Mas'ūdī’s and Bar Bahlul’s reports, a degree of comfort with the Kalends on the part of ecclesiastical authorities—in stark contrast to what we observed in our late ancient sources. With those two themes in mind—continuity of custom and a degree of newfound sacralization—let us turn to our evidence for the celebration of the Kalends among Melkite communities in territories beyond the former borders of the Roman Empire.

4. Beyond the Mediterranean: The Kalends from Iraq to Central Asia (Tenth and Eleventh Centuries CE)

While examining the Kalends’ perseverance in greater Syria, we have already had occasion to review one tenth-century Iraqi author, Bar Bahlul, who attributed the festival to Melkites but did not specifically situate its celebration in his own native Iraq. However, two sources spanning the tenth century demonstrate that Melkite communities to the east in Iraq and Central Asia did in fact maintain the ancient Roman

55 For comparanda see Tannous, “Romanness in the Syriac East” (n. 41 above), 475–76. I am indebted to the anonymous reviewer for *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* for suggesting this point to me.

56 On the dating see with references L. Van Rompay, “Bar Bahlul, Ḥasan,” in *The Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. S. P. Brock, A. M. Butts, G. A. Kiraz, and L. van Rompa (Piscataway, NJ, 2011), 54.

57 Bar Bahlul (Ibn Bahlūl), *Kitāb al-dalā'il*, ed. Y. Ḥabbī (Kuwait, 1987), 117. As noted by Ḥabbī, 117, n. 21, the manuscript reads *al-QLYDYS*. This is likely a mispointing for *al-QLNDYS*, given that that spelling occurs shortly thereafter (118). But I do not agree with Ḥabbī’s decision to emend *al-QLNDYS* to what he calls the “correct” spelling, *al-QLNDS*, since as we have seen no one standard Arabic spelling for the Kalends exists in medieval Arabic. For the manuscript spelling, cf. the false etymology of “Kalends” as if from Greek κλέις/Syriac *qlidā* (key) noted above at n. 33.

58 Bar Bahlul (Ibn Bahlūl), *Kitāb al-dalā'il*, 118. By contrast, Ḥabbī (118, n. 28) interprets *sābū' maryam* to indicate that the

festival of the Kalends was (or rather continued to be) celebrated over a period of several days—an interpretation I find less likely. One Melkite source confirms Bar Bahlul’s claim that 1 January could be celebrated as the octave of the Nativity, but without labeling 1 January the Kalends: see *Le calendrier palestinogéorgien du Sinaiticus 34 (Xe siècle)*, ed. G. Garitte, SubsHag 30 (Brussels, 1958), 43 (Georgian text and French trans.), 122–23 (Garitte’s commentary). I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* who drew my attention to this source.

festival of the Kalends. Like the texts from the eastern Mediterranean, these sources testify to a high degree of continuity between late ancient Graeco-Roman customs and their Islamic-era counterparts. Yet more clearly than in our sources for the Mediterranean, we catch a glimpse of how these far-flung Melkite communities attached a new, sacred significance to the Kalends, one intimately connected with their identity as Chalcedonian Orthodox Christians.

By the early tenth century at the latest, Christians—presumably Melkites but perhaps Byzantine Greeks as well—were celebrating the Kalends in Baghdad. Our evidence comes from the *Rusūm dār al-ḥilāfa* by the courtier Abū l-Ḥasan Hilāl ibn al-Muḥassin al-Ṣābi' (d. 1056), a nostalgic catalog of 'Abbāsid palace culture as it had been in the days of his forebears. The reference to the Kalends occurs in a lengthy citation of a budget statement drawn up by the famous vizier 'Alī ibn 'Īsā (d. 946). As Hilāl expressly notes, 'Alī ibn 'Īsā wrote the statement in 306 AH (i.e., 918–19 CE).⁵⁹ This document, as quoted or paraphrased by Hilāl, gives a detailed account of state expenditures for that year, covering everything from military equipment to the upkeep of the caliph's menagerie to the personal allowances of his family members. Alongside funds dedicated to the retention of various Islamic religious functionaries and to provisions for the Islamic holidays of 'Īd al-Fiṭr and 'Īd al-Aḍḥā, we read of yearly funds provided for "gifts to the household servants on the occasion of the Kalends (*al-QLND'S*)."⁶⁰

59 Hilāl al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm* (n. 10 above), 21; translated into English as Hilāl al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm dār al-khilāfa* (*The Rules and Regulations of the 'Abbāsid Court*), trans. E. A. Salem (Beirut, 1977), 23. 'Alī ibn 'Īsā did not serve as vizier himself during this year, *pace* the text's editor 'Awwād, *Rusūm*, 21, n. 5. However, it is possible he wrote the budget statement while serving as deputy and *éminence grise* for the incompetent Ḥāmid ibn al-'Abbās, who had replaced Ibn al-Furāt as vizier early in 306 AH: for these details see with references H. Bowen, "'Alī b. 'Īsā," *EP* (accessed via BrillOnline).

60 Hilāl al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 23; *silat al-farrāṣīn bi-sabab al-QLND'S*; trans. Salem, *The Rules and Regulations of the 'Abbāsid Court*, 24–25. The term *farrāṣūn* (household servants) refers at its most specific to valets de chambre who spread carpets and arrange bedding. Salem's "New Year's Eve [Christian]" is his own explanatory interpolation, evidently influenced by 'Awwād (*Rusūm*, 24, n. 5), and is not present in the Arabic. The first of January was, of course, not the beginning of the Melkite liturgical year and had never been the start of the Syrian ordering of the year's months.

This passing reference in 'Alī ibn 'Īsā's document provides important testimony and fleshes out our understanding of the celebration of the Kalends in the Islamic world. While 'Alī does not specify how much the state spent each year on Kalends gifts for the palace servants, it must have been a tiny fraction of the budget.⁶¹ Still, that our festival—alone of non-Muslim celebrations—should receive mention here alongside the two canonical Islamic holidays suggests its importance to at least some Baghdadis. Yet I do not read the passage as evidence for Baghdadi Muslims' broader adoption of the Kalends: the servants mentioned are almost certainly Christians enjoying a yearly display of largess on a day significant to them.⁶² Given the testimony of our other Arabic sources on the Kalends, we can surmise that these Christian servants were Iraqi Melkites, but they may also have included Byzantine Greeks (*rūm*). The cosmopolitan 'Abbāsid capital was home to a small Byzantine population, and some were perhaps part of the caliph's household itself.⁶³ 'Alī's

61 Kalends gifts occur as only one item out of a subgroup of nineteen expenses recurring on a yearly basis, for which subgroup the state spent a total of 42,007 *dinārs* in 306 AH: Hilāl al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 24–25 (trans. *The Rules and Regulations of the 'Abbāsid Court*, 24–25). This was out of an operating budget of 14,829,840 *dinārs* for that year, a figure that does not even include the expenses incurred in some of the caliphate's more remote provinces, expressly omitted by 'Alī ibn 'Īsā from his budget statement: see Hilāl al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm*, 21 (trans. *The Rules and Regulations of the 'Abbāsid Court*, 23).

62 If superiors had given Kalends gifts to Muslim subordinates as well in the 'Abbāsid capital, the holiday would have left a broader trace. By contrast, gift exchange on the officially non-Islamic holidays of Nowruz and Mehragān, both tied to the Persian solar calendar, is well attested and hence must have been popular among Baghdadi Muslims: see, e.g., al-Ġāḥiz, *Risālat al-qiṣṣa* §49, in *The Epistle on the Singing-Girls of Jāhīz*, ed. and trans. A. F. L. Bestow, *Approaches to Arabic Literature* 2 (Warminster, 1980), 19 (Arabic text), 33 (English trans.). Al-Tanūḥī, *Niṣwār al-muḥāḍara*, ed. 'A. al-Ṣāliḡī, 8 vols. (Beirut, 1971–73; repr. Beirut, 1995), 8:246, relates an anecdote in which the East Syrian court physician Buḥtīṣū' ibn Ġibrīl (d. 870) addresses the caliph al-Mutawakkil and coyly protests his ignorance of the court's gift exchanges on Nowruz and Mehragān, citing as an excuse his Christianity. This story suggests that many Christians really did neglect these gift exchanges and that if the caliph wished to remunerate Christian subordinates, he would do well to choose another occasion. The Kalends provided such an occasion, at least for Melkites.

63 For Baghdadi Byzantines who were connected to the caliph's household and who maintained Byzantine culture, see, e.g., the anecdote preserved from a ninth-century source in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā'*, ed. A. Müller, 2 vols. (Cairo and Königsberg, 1882–84), 1:185–86, with the discussion of G. Strohmaier,

budget statement testifies that gift exchange—particularly across social classes—continued to be as central as it had been in late antiquity. We have observed, in section 1, the late ancient and early Byzantine custom whereby professionals received special bonuses on the Kalends, as the emperor bestowed gifts on public officials. In some form, this Kalends custom played out in the caliph's household. As in Islamic Syria and Palestine, at least some Iraqi Muslims displayed an awareness of and limited participation in the festival.

The date of the budget statement's composition (918–19) and the fact that Kalends gifts are described as a yearly expense indicate that the festival had reached the environs of Baghdad by the early tenth century at the latest. The festival's presence in the region may well be older. The area had boasted a small Melkite community since at least the mid-sixth century, when Kōsrow I resettled captives from Antioch, Chalcedonian Christians among them, outside Seleucia-Ctesiphon.⁶⁴ With the construction of Baghdad nearby in 762, al-Manṣūr relocated this community to Čāč (Arabic Šāš, modern-day Tashkent) in Central Asia.⁶⁵ Yet by the early tenth century—precisely the same time as 'Alī ibn 'Īsā's budget statement—the Abbāsid capital once again had a flourishing Melkite population, for we read of a dispute occurring around this time between the Melkite communities of Baghdad and of Čāč.⁶⁶ 'Alī's reference thus testifies either to a relatively recent introduction—perhaps reintroduction—of the festival or else to the unbroken continuity of its celebration among whatever Melkites avoided al-Manṣūr's eighth-century population transfer. Either way, a second reference to the Kalends suggests that

Chalcedonian Christians brought their ancient festival with them wherever they settled.

Beyond Iraq, the Kalends of January continued in force among Melkites as far away as Central Asia, where the festival took on a new, sacred meaning. Our evidence comes from the chronological treatise *al-Ātār al-bāqiya 'an al-qurūn al-hāliya* of the Muslim polymath Abū l-Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048), who provides, of all the sources we have surveyed, the most detailed and valuable testimony concerning the Islamic-era celebration of the Kalends. Writing around 1000 at the Ziyārid court in what is now northern Iran,⁶⁷ al-Bīrūnī records the festal calendar of Melkite Christians. He is most emphatic that the festivals and holy days he describes belong specifically to those Melkites dwelling in his native Ḥwārazm—perhaps near his likely birthplace to the south of the former Aral Sea in what is now Uzbekistan.⁶⁸ His account therefore mixes authentic reportage of these Melkites' liturgical calendar with what appear to be personal observations of local Melkite feast-day customs.⁶⁹ For the beginning of the month of Kānūn II (i.e., January), we read the following:

Kānūn II. On first day of this month is the memorial feast of [St.] Basil, and it is also the festival of the Kalends (*'id al-QLND'S*). Kalends (*Q'LNDS*) means “May it be good.” On this day the Christian children assemble and go round from one house to the other, crying with high voices and in a sort of melody “Kalends! Kalends! (*Q'LNDS Q'LNDS*).” Therefore they receive in every house something to eat, and cups [of wine?] to drink. As the reason of this custom some people assert

“Homer in Bagdad,” *Byzantinoslavica* 41 (1980): 196–200 (reprinted in his *Von Demokrit bis Dante: Die Bewahrung antiken Erbes in der arabischen Kultur* [Hildesheim, 1996]).

64 Procopius, *De bellis* 2.9.14, 2.14.1–4.

65 Ibrāhīm ibn Yūḥannā, *Life of Christopher*, in H. Zayat, ed. and trans., “Vie du patriarche melkite d'Antioche Christophore par le protospathaire Ibrahim b. Yuhanna, Document inédit du X siècle,” *Proche Orient Chrétien* 2 (1952): 11–38, 333–66 at 20 (Arabic text), 23 (French trans.).

66 Ibrāhīm ibn Yūḥannā, *Life of Christopher*, 22 (Arabic text), 23 (French trans.). For more on these testimonies to Melkite resettlement, see K. Parry, “Byzantine-Rite Christians (Melkites) in Central Asia in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages,” in *Thinking Diversely: Hellenism and the Challenge of Globalisation*, ed. E. Kefallino, special issue of *Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand)* (Sydney, 2012), 91–108 at 95–98.

67 Sachau, in al-Bīrūnī, *Chronologie orientalischen Völker von Albérūnī* (n. 34 above), xx–xxvii.

68 Al-Bīrūnī, *Ātār* (n. 34 above; trans. *Chronology* [n. 34 above], 283). When describing the practices of Melkites living elsewhere, al-Bīrūnī appears to make this explicit, as he does twice when contrasting Ḥwārazmian from Ḥurāsānian Melkite custom: al-Bīrūnī, *Ātār*, 296, 299 (trans. *Chronology*, 292, 295). On the probable location of al-Bīrūnī's birthplace, see M. Yano, “al-Bīrūnī,” *EB* (accessed via BrillOnline).

69 On al-Bīrūnī's report in the context of Orthodox liturgical history, see now D. Galadza, *Liturgy and Byzantinization in Jerusalem* (Oxford, 2018), 83–84, and idem, “Liturgical Byzantinization in Jerusalem: al-Biruni's Melkite Calendar in Context,” *BollGrott*, ser. 3, 7 (2010): 69–85, with a brief notice of the Kalends at 73.

that this is New Year's Day among the Romans [or Byzantines] (*al-rūm*), namely one week after Mary had given birth to Christ. Others relate as its reason the following story: Arius on having come forward with his view (*ra'yuhū*),⁷⁰ and having found adherents, took possession of one of the Christian churches, but the people of that church protested against it. Finally, they arranged with each other, and came to this agreement: that they would shut the door of the church for three days; then they would proceed together to the church, and recite⁷¹ before it alternately. That party, then, to whom the door would open of itself should be its legal owner. They followed through with this plan. The church door did not open of itself to Arius, but rather opened to the other party—or so they claim. Therefore their children do such things in imitation of the happy message which they received at that time.⁷²

There can be little doubt that this remarkable report treats the Kalends as celebrated by Ḥwārazmian Melkites. Yet al-Bīrūnī does not specify his sources for the various explanatory and etiological details his report includes. From where does the Muslim scientist

draw his information? Answering this question will help us better evaluate the questions of continuity and change in the festival's custom and meaning.

While some written document may have provided the skeleton of his liturgical calendar, I argue that al-Bīrūnī is drawing on local Melkite informants for all or most of his explanations of Kalends customs. To begin with, there is every reason to believe that Central Asian Melkites, such as those of al-Bīrūnī's Ḥwārazm, were well informed about their religion and could draw on a wide range of sources to explain it. We have already had occasion to note that Central Asian Melkites in Čāč communicated with their Baghdadi coreligionists.⁷³ Moreover, the liturgy of al-Bīrūnī's Melkite calendar represents a transitional stage in which the old Jerusalemite rite had not yet been fully Byzantinized and is comparable to that described in roughly contemporaneous material from Palestine, suggesting an interchange between these Ḥwārazmians and the broader Melkite world.⁷⁴ Documentary evidence from Bulayīq near Turfan in what is now Xinjiang suggests that some Central Asian Melkites—presumably elite clerics—retained knowledge of Greek and had access to Greek texts.⁷⁵ Therefore, Central Asian Melkites such as al-Bīrūnī's Ḥwārazmians were surely capable

70 Al-Bīrūnī has already described the Christological *ārā'* (sg. *ra'y*)—i.e., “views, opinions”—belonging to different Christian sects, including the “view” of Arius (d. 336): *Ātār*, 288 (trans. *Chronology*, 282). Here he expects the reader to recall this earlier discussion.

71 I interpret *yaqra'ū* as “recite” rather than Sachau's “read” based on the parallel Byzantine Greek accounts of this legend, which were unknown to Sachau: see n. 89 below.

72 al-Bīrūnī, *Ātār*, 292–93: *kānūnu l-āḥīru fī l-yawmi l-awwali minhu dukrānu bāsīliyyūsa wa-huwa ayḍan 'idu l-QLND'Si wa-taḥsīru QLND'Sa ḥayran kāna wa-fīhi yağma'u šibyānu l-našārā wa-yaṭūfūna fī buyūtibim wa-yahruḡūna min dārin ilā uhrā wa-yaqūlūna QLND'Sa QLND'Sa bi-ṣawtin 'ālin wa-laḥnin fa-yuṭ'amūna fī kulli dārin wa-yusqawna aqdāḥan mina l-šarābi fa-baḍun yaz'umu anna ḍālika li-annahū ra'su l-sanati 'inda l-rūmi wa-huwa tamāmu l-usbū'i min wilādati maryama wa-yaz'amu baḍun anna ariyūsa lammā zahara ra'yuhū wa-tāba'ahū man tāba'ahu stawlā 'alā bi'atin min biya'ihim fa-ḥaṣamahū ahlubā tumma tarāḍaw wa-ṣtalahū 'alā an yağliqū bābahā talātata ayyāmin tumma yağ'i'ūhu mā'an wa-yaqra'ū 'alaybi bi-l-nūbi fa-mani nfataḥa labu l-bābu fa-huwa mustaḥiqquhā fa-fa'alū ḍālika wa-lam yanfatih li-ariyūsa wa-nfataḥa labum za'amū fa-li-ḍālika yaf'alu šibyānuhum mā yaf'alūna tašbihan bi-l-biṣārati llati buṣširū bibā fī ḍālika l-waḡti. I quote with modifications the translation of *Chronology*, 288.*

73 See n. 66 above.

74 See Galadza, “Liturgical Byzantinization in Jerusalem,” and A. Baumstark, “Ausstrahlungen des vorbyzantinischen Heiligenkalenders von Jerusalem,” *OCP* 2 (1936): 129–44. Parry, “Byzantine-Rite Christians (Melkites) in Central Asia,” 101–2, cites al-Bīrūnī's assertion, at *Ātār*, 295 (trans. *Chronology*, 291), that his Melkites recognized six, not seven, ecumenical councils as an indication of their isolation from the Chalcedonian mainstream. However, the point is not to be pressed too hard. As Parry himself briefly notes, the recognition of only six councils is characteristic of Melkites living in Palestine as well and is hence not a mark of the Ḥwārazmians' particular isolation: see further Galadza, *Liturgy and Byzantinization*, 82.

75 The excavated document in question, So. 12,955 (Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin), is a perhaps ninth-century manuscript fragment containing a Sogdian translation of Psalm 33 (Masoretic) = Psalm 32 (Septuagint). The manuscript fragment presents a single phrase from the Greek of the Septuagint, the opening of the psalm, written alongside the Sogdian translation. Given that the Sogdian translation is manifestly dependent, in parts, on the Greek of the Septuagint, N. Sims-Williams (“A Greek-Sogdian Bilingual from Bulayīq,” in *La Persia e Bisanzio*, Atti dei Convegni Lincei 201 [Rome, 2004], 625–31) interprets this document as evidence for Melkite use of Greek further west in Central Asia. For further contextualization of this documentary evidence see Parry, “Byzantine-Rite Christians (Melkites) in Central Asia,” 100–101.

of drawing on the broader Chalcedonian tradition to explain their customs to an outside inquirer, even if those explanations may have been idiosyncratic and not representative of Melkites living elsewhere in the Islamic East.

The analysis above has suggested that al-Bīrūnī's Melkites were capable of providing him with etiologies, even sophisticated ones, of their own festivals. Conversely, the evidence provided by al-Bīrūnī's Kalends report itself and by its immediate context within his chapter on the Melkite calendar strongly suggests that the Muslim scientist did in fact derive this explanatory information from the Ḥwārazmian Melkite community. Note, first and foremost, the variation between the well-attested spelling *al-QLND'S* when the official name of the festival is provided and the otherwise unattested spelling *QLNDS* when the words that the child carolers sing are reported. This change of spelling suggests his direct engagement with local traditions and therefore implies a local Melkite informant for the folk etymology of the festival's name—clearly inspired by Greek *καλός* (good, beautiful).⁷⁶ Moreover, internal evidence also suggests that the two competing explanations of the festival's etiology, whose significance will be discussed in more detail below, reflect local Melkite origin stories for their Kalends customs. Throughout his report of the Melkite calendar, al-Bīrūnī is meticulous in citing literary sources by name.⁷⁷ The anonymity, by contrast, of his two reports on the Kalends' origin points compellingly to local, probably oral sources, as

does a statement of al-Bīrūnī's regarding an oral source that appears just before his Kalends account.⁷⁸

If we widen our examination to the immediately surrounding chapters of the *Ātār*, the supposition that al-Bīrūnī is drawing on local, oral Melkite sources in his Kalends report becomes even more plausible. The chapter on the Melkite calendar is only the seventh of twelve chapters devoted to the calendar systems of disparate peoples and religious groups. At the very outset of this section, when embarking on an exposition of the Persian calendar, al-Bīrūnī expresses doubt in the accuracy of some written calendrical sources and emphasizes the need to cross-check such works.⁷⁹ While often citing written sources in these chapters, al-Bīrūnī also makes explicit reference at two key points to what we might term "ethnographic fieldwork." In his chapter on the Ḥarrānian Šābian calendar, he laments that he was unable, as had been his method (*ṭarīqa*) elsewhere, to speak with a member of this ethno-religious group and hence cannot personally verify the accuracy of the information he provides.⁸⁰ Similarly, in his chapter on the East-Syrian ("Nestorian") Christian calendar, al-Bīrūnī explains why he has not included a complementary chapter on Syriac Orthodox ("Jacobite") feasts: he could not find any Syriac Orthodox Christian to interview, or even any other local informant familiar with the Syriac Orthodox calendar.⁸¹

Indeed, not just in these calendrical chapters but throughout the *Ātār* and in other works, al-Bīrūnī

76 Sachau, in al-Bīrūnī, *Chronology*, 288, already intuited the obvious inspiration of the false Greek etymology. In fact, a folk etymology deriving the festival name *Καλάνδαι* from *καλός* is attested from Graeco-Roman antiquity and preserved in the Jerusalem Talmud: y. *Avodah Zarah* 1:2 (39c). On this Talmudic etymology of the Kalends, according to which Adam was the festival's founder, see further the contextualizations of G. Veltri, "Römische Religion an der Peripherie des Reiches: Ein Kapitel rabbinischer Politik," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, ed. P. Schäfer and C. Hezser, vol. 2 (Tübingen, 2000), 81–138 at 117–19, and J. Scheid, "Les réjouissances des calendes de janvier d'après le sermon Dolbeau 26: Nouvelles lumières sur une fête mal connue," in *Augustin prédicateur (395–411): Actes du Colloque International de Chantilly (5–7 septembre 1996)*, ed. G. Madec (Paris, 1998), 353–65 at 364–65.

77 Cf. al-Bīrūnī, *Ātār*, 289–90 (trans. *Chronology*, 284–85); 290 (trans. *Chronology*, 285); 292 (trans. *Chronology*, 287).

78 See al-Bīrūnī, *Ātār*, 292 (trans. *Chronology*, 287–88), where the author contrasts trustworthy written sources with an oral report he has obtained from (apparently local) Christians, concerning a certain martyr. He deems this Christian report credulous and unreliable—precisely the stance he takes concerning the legend of the church door in his account of the Kalends. This parallelism strongly suggests an oral source for his information in the Kalends account as well.

79 The passage was missing in the three lacunose manuscripts accessed by Sachau and hence is not present in his edition. For the text see J. Fück, "Sechs Ergänzungen zu Sachaus Ausgabe von al-Bīrūnīs 'Chronologie Orientalischer Völker,'" in *Documenta Islamica Inedita*, ed. J. Fück (Berlin, 1952), 69–98 at 83.

80 Al-Bīrūnī, *Ātār*, 322 (trans. *Chronology*, 318). Al-Bīrūnī expresses the hope that he will encounter a member of this community in the future and hence be able to "proceed according to the method we have followed in the other cases" (*salaknā fihā ṭarīqatanā l-maslūkata fī ḡayrihā*).

81 Al-Bīrūnī, *Ātār*, 315 (trans. *Chronology*, 312).

refers with some frequency to named oral sources.⁸² Occasionally, we are able to match information derived from such a source with texts produced by members of the minority community to which the informant belonged. To give one striking example from the calendrical section, when providing a reworked and expanded account of the biblical narrative concerning Moses, Aaron, and the golden calf, al-Bīrūnī cites a conversation he had in Gorgān (Jurjān) with the Jewish physician Ya'qūb ibn Mūsā.⁸³ In al-Bīrūnī's retelling, the story finds marked parallels in extant Jewish texts, including the Babylonian Talmud, although the match is not perfect in any one instance.⁸⁴ Years later, "ethnographic" interviews—sometimes with the cross-examination of multiple informants—would serve as a major source for al-Bīrūnī's famous description of Indian science and culture.⁸⁵ If we consider this wider context, there is every reason to believe that al-Bīrūnī verified and expanded whatever written source on the Melkite calendar he may have consulted by conversing with one or more members of the Ḥwārazmian Melkite community. Therefore, the etiologies and meanings ascribed to the Kalends by al-Bīrūnī very likely originated within this Melkite community itself.

With this context in mind, let us turn to the evidence afforded by al-Bīrūnī's report of both continuity and change in the Kalends customs. The Muslim polymath's testimony provides our most detailed description yet of the Islamic-era Kalends, documenting a remarkable continuity of custom between the late ancient Mediterranean and medieval Central Asia. The door-to-door caroling by children seeking token remuneration—described by Asterius in 400 CE—finds a precise parallel in al-Bīrūnī's report. Apparently

reduced from its late ancient duration of five days, the Kalends are still a period of revelry, one of several Ḥwārazmian Melkite folk festivals running in parallel with the solemn liturgical year.⁸⁶ It is likely that the Kalends practices described by al-Bīrūnī continued in their essentials among Melkite communities further west in this period as well, though we cannot be certain.

In addition to continuity, however, we also observe a significant change—one that hints at the reason behind the Kalends' enduring popularity among Melkite communities and its evolving meaning. What significance did the Kalends possess for medieval Melkites? If 1 January had long since ceased to be the formal start of the new year for Byzantines and Melkites alike, why did the Kalends continue to be celebrated? Indeed, al-Bīrūnī's Melkites, who started their calendar in Tišrīn I (October) according to the Syrian order, celebrated a "festival of the year's crown" (*'id iklīl al-sana*) on first day of the year's final month, Aylūl (September).⁸⁷ Al-Bīrūnī's two narratives concerning the Kalends' origin, which I have suggested derive from the Ḥwārazmian Melkite community itself, help answer this question.

Let us begin with al-Bīrūnī's first explanation, concerning the Roman New Year and the Nativity of Christ. It is unclear, admittedly, whether knowledge of the ancient Roman New Year's Day on 1 January was necessarily widespread among Ḥwārazmian Melkites, since as we saw above al-Bīrūnī had access to that information from other sources. If that aspect of his explanation does come from the Ḥwārazmian Melkites themselves, then did this community still identify to some degree as *rūmī* ("Roman" or "Byzantine")? It is possible, but we cannot be certain.⁸⁸ Al-Bīrūnī's citation of the week-long period between Christmas and the Kalends, more certainly attributable to the Ḥwārazmian Melkites, echoes Bar Bahlul's report reviewed in section 3 and suggests an attempt to endow

82 D. Pingree, "Āṭār al-bāqīa," *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (1987; repr. 2011), 2.8:906–9, has collected instances in the *Āṭār* where al-Bīrūnī mentions his oral informant by name.

83 Al-Bīrūnī, *Āṭār*, 276 (trans. *Chronology*, 269–70).

84 The slight overlap in material with b. Sotah 13a was noted already by Sachau, in al-Bīrūnī, *Chronology*, 430. In fact, other Jewish sources provide much stronger parallels: see with references L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, trans. H. Szold and P. Radin, 4 vols. (Philadelphia, 2003), 1:428–30, 1:621–22. This al-Bīrūnī passage has been discussed together with other Arabic material by M. Grünbaum, *Neue Beiträge zur Semitischen Sagenkunde* (Leiden, 1893), 150–51. I am most grateful to James Redfield for directing my attention to these sources.

85 See, for example, al-Bīrūnī, *Tahqīq mā li-l-hind* (n. 41 above), 267 (trans. *Al-Bīrūnī's India* [n. 41 above], 2:129).

86 One might compare the Feast of the Roses (*'id al-ward*), celebrated by the Ḥwārazmian Melkites on 4 May and by the Ḥurāsānīan Melkites on 15 May, which Parry ("Byzantine-Rite Christians (Melkites) in Central Asia," 102) has tentatively connected with the ancient Roman festival of the Rosalia or Rhodophoria. See al-Bīrūnī, *Āṭār*, 296, 299 (trans. *Chronology*, 292 [incorrectly given as 3 May], 295).

87 Al-Bīrūnī, *Āṭār*, 301 (trans. *Chronology*, 297).

88 Outsiders did refer to Central Asia Melkites as "Romans": see Parry, "Byzantine-Rite Christians (Melkites) in Central Asia" (n. 66 above), 97–98.

the Kalends with new meaning by associating it with the octave of the Nativity. It indicates a desire on the part of the Ḥwārazmian Melkites to integrate this secular festival into the liturgical calendar and hence justify it by endowing it with new religious significance. If we can read al-Bīrūnī's first explanation of the Kalends as an attempt by Melkites to add a sacred significance to this originally secular holiday, what of the second explanation he cites?

I interpret al-Bīrūnī's second etiology of the Kalends, the narrative of Arius and the miraculously opening door, in precisely the same way. Assuming, as seems in this case almost certain, that the Ḥwārazmian Melkites themselves applied this origin story to the Kalends, the narrative speaks to a similar desire to invest this ancient festival with a new sacred meaning. Previous scholarship has failed to observe that a version of al-Bīrūnī's narrative is known from two Byzantine Greek sources, which must preserve the original story.⁸⁹ In this original version, however, the narrative has no explicit connection with the Kalends; the Byzantine sources present it simply as an episode in the life of Basil of Caesarea (d. 379)—the very saint whose feast Chalcedonian Orthodox Christians celebrate on 1 January, as al-Bīrūnī himself notes. The Byzantine version therefore centers on the saint and his opposition not to Arius himself, who died when Basil was still a small child, but to a group of Arian Christians. In the Byzantine sources, to win back a church usurped by the Arianizing emperor Valens, Basil proposes that both sides, Arians and Orthodox, plead their case before the church's closed door. If the door opens to the Arians, the church will belong to them; but if it opens to Basil and his group of Orthodox faithful, then it will belong to the Orthodox. Just as in al-Bīrūnī, the door fails to move for the Arians but, of course, bursts open as soon as Basil and his company begin their prayers.

89 Pseudo-Amphilochius, *Life of St. Basil* 14, in *Sanctorum patrum Amphilochii Iconiensis, Methodii Patavensis et Andreae Cretensis Opera Omnia*, ed. R. P. Combefis (Paris, 1644), 206–11; Zonaras, *Epitome of Histories* 13.16, in *Ioannis Zonarae Annales*, ed. M. Pinder and T. Büttner-Wobst, 3 vols. CSHB (Bonn, 1841–97), 3:75–77 (Greek text), translated into English in *The "History" of Zonaras: From Alexander Severus to the Death of Theodosius the Great*, trans. T. M. Banchich and E. N. Lane (London, 2009), 180. Pseudo-Amphilochius's text (*BHG* 256/*CPG* 3253) dates to no later than the mid-ninth century and Zonaras, who is not obviously dependent on Pseudo-Amphilochius, wrote in the early twelfth. See further the commentary of Banchich in *The "History" of Zonaras*, 250.

I argue that the original Greek version, with Basil as protagonist, is closer to the legend known to the Ḥwārazmian Melkites and that al-Bīrūnī has simply muddled the tale by omitting Basil.⁹⁰ We might compare the way in which al-Bīrūnī's version of the golden calf story—drawn, as noted above, from his conversation with a Jewish acquaintance—parallels but does not completely overlap with extant Jewish sources. Observing that the Kalends fall on the same day as Basil's feast, al-Bīrūnī's Melkites have adopted the Basil legend as an ad hoc explanation for the ancient unrelated custom of door-to-door caroling on the Kalends. According to this "just so" etiology, children go around singing before their neighbors' doors in imitation of the saint and his fellow Orthodox Christians who saved Orthodoxy at a crucial moment in church history.⁹¹ What was once a purely secular folk tradition that earned the churchman Asterius's censure has been reimagined as an expression of Orthodox pride. The Kalends have gained a second life as a celebration of Melkite or Orthodox identity in a peripheral locale far from Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople, and other centers of Chalcedonian Orthodoxy.

Was such a sacralization of the Kalends unique to al-Bīrūnī's Ḥwārazmian Melkites? While the details may have differed from region to region, I argue that it was not. After all, we saw elements of an accommodation between the secular and the sacred in al-Mas'ūdī's and Bar Bahlul's reports in section 3 above. In fact, we possess ample evidence of an even more fundamental attempt to sacralize the Kalends, to which we will now turn our attention.

5. A Radical Departure: The Kalends as a Designation of the Theophany in Palestine

The texts reviewed so far attest to the continued celebration of the ancient festival of the Kalends among Melkites across the tenth-century Islamic world, from Syria, Palestine, and Egypt to Iraq and even Central

90 Al-Bīrūnī had knowledge of Arius, presumably from other sources, and likened Arius's Christology to Islam's—an interest that may account for his having pride of place in the narrative: see al-Bīrūnī, *Ātār*, 288 (trans. *Chronology*, 282).

91 It is worth noting in this connection that Pseudo-Amphilochius, *Life of St. Basil* 14 (209), presents Basil as singing (ψάλλον) hymns, in the company of women and children (σὺν γυναιξὶ καὶ τέκνοις).

Asia. However, for at least some Melkite Christians in Palestine in roughly the same period and probably earlier, the term “Kalends” had come to have a radically new sacred meaning. Our evidence comes from a small number of closely related Palestinian Melkite texts—a Christian Palestinian Aramaic lectionary containing some Garshuni Arabic (Westminster MS, “Palestinian Syriac Lectionary”),⁹² an incomplete Arabic collection of the Pauline epistles (split across Sinai ar. 155 and London, British Library, or. 8612),⁹³ and several continuous Arabic gospel translations (Sinai ar. 54, Sinai ar. 72, Sinai ar. 74, and Berlin ar. oct. 1108).⁹⁴ These texts—translations and lectionary alike—contain lectionary rubrics indicating when in the ecclesiastical year certain portions of scripture were to be recited in church, and a handful of these rubrics make reference

to the Kalends. But for the authors and users of these rubrics, the term “Kalends” was now a designation for the Theophany on 6 January (the Orthodox feast commemorating Christ’s baptism), as the liturgical content of the rubrics themselves and the lessons they accompany make unambiguously clear.⁹⁵ The form of the name “Kalends” in these lectionary rubrics—Arabic *al-QLND* and Christian Palestinian Aramaic *QLNDā*—differs from that of all other Arabic and Syriac attestations of the term, lacking as it does the final *sin* or *semkat*. This section will review our evidence for the geographical and chronological extent of this usage. While these sources might suggest the beginning of a decline in the celebration of the 1 January Kalends, further evidence is needed before we can draw such a conclusion. Instead, the section will conclude by contextualizing the lectionary rubrics’ usage against the backdrop of two social phenomena we have already noted: the late ancient rivalry between the Kalends and Theophany and the medieval Melkite tendency, observed in Antioch and Central Asia, to sacralize the once purely secular Kalends.

First, what light can the provenance and general features of the Melkite lectionary and New Testament translations shed on the geographical and chronological spread of this distinct liturgical use of the term “Kalends”? Nearly all of the manuscripts containing these texts—Arabic and Christian Palestinian Aramaic alike—are or were formerly preserved in St. Catherine’s Monastery in the Sinai. However, there is little doubt that these texts and their rubrics are the products of a Palestinian monastic milieu.⁹⁶ When we consider

92 This unique manuscript, which has no shelf mark, is preserved in the collection of Westminster Theological College, Cambridge, and has been edited by A. S. Lewis in *A Palestinian Syriac Lectionary: Containing Lessons from the Pentateuch, Job, Proverbs, Prophets, Acts, and Epistles* (London, 1897).

93 On this recension of the Pauline epistles in Arabic translation see with references V. Zaki, “The Textual History of the Arabic Pauline Epistles: One Version, Three Recensions, Six Manuscripts,” in *Senses of Scripture, Treasures of Tradition: The Bible in Arabic among Jews, Christians, and Muslims*, ed. M. L. Hjälml (Leiden, 2017), 392–424 at 393–94. I have not accessed BL or. 8612 or Sinai ar. 155, which contains most of the collection; it has been edited by M. D. Gibson, *An Arabic Version of the Epistles of St. Paul to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians with Part of the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Cambridge, 1894).

94 I am most grateful to Alexander Treiger for directing my attention to the evidence found in these gospel translations. Sinai ar. 72 has been edited by S. Arbache, “Une version arabe des évangiles: Langue, texte et lexique,” 3 vols. (PhD diss., Université Michel de Montaigne Bordeaux III, 1994). Lectionary rubrics from Sinai ar. 72 have been edited and discussed by G. Garitte, “Les rubriques liturgiques de quelques anciens tétraévangiles arabes du Sinaï,” in *Mélanges liturgiques offerts à Bernard Botte OSB de l’Abbaye du Mont César à l’occasion du 50. anniversaire de son ordination sacerdotale (4 Juin 1972)* (Louvain, 1972), 151–66. On the relationship of this and another Christian Palestinian lectionary with the gospel translations, see with references S. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the “People of the Book” in the Language of Islam* (Princeton, 2013), 119–20, and A. Baumstark, “Die sonntägliche Evangelienlesung im vöryzantinischen Jerusalem,” *BZ* 30 (1929–30): 350–59 at 352–53. For the relationship of the Arabic Pauline epistles with these texts, see F. C. Burkitt, “The Palestinian Syriac Lectionary,” *JTS* 6.21 (1904): 91–98 at 95–98. On the interrelationship of the gospel translations, see H. Kashouh, *The Arabic Versions of the Gospels: The Manuscripts and Their Families* (Berlin, 2012), 86–87.

95 Burkitt, “The Palestinian Syriac Lectionary,” 96–97, n. 3, and A. Baumstark, “Zur arabischen Archelideslegende,” *ZDMG* 67.1 (1913): 126–28, followed by G. Graf, *Verzeichnis arabischer kirchlicher Termini*, CSCO 147, Subsidia 8 (Leuven, 1954), 92; Garitte, “Les rubriques liturgiques,” 158; and R. Vollandt, *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch: A Comparative Study of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Sources* (Leiden, 2015), 55.

96 Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 119–20; Burkitt, “The Palestinian Syriac Lectionary,” 95–98. The colophon of Berlin or. oct. 1108, fol. 206r names the manuscript’s scribe, one “Stephen son of Farnah(?) the Antiochene, known as the Rus’ man” (*Istifān ibn Farnah(?) al-Anṭākī al-ma’rūf bi-l-Rūsī*), and describes the circumstances of its copying. It is of course possible that the language deployed in these rubrics found favor among some members of the Sinaitic monastic community that preserved the majority of the manuscripts, but Galadza (*Liturgy and Byzantinization* [n. 69 above], 21), cautions against drawing such conclusions.

their audience, we should bear in mind that these texts' rubrics, unlike the lessons they head, were not intended for public consumption. It is possible that they reflect a broader popular usage among Palestinian Melkites—but it is also possible that they reflect the terminology of the Palestinian monastic centers that produced the texts.

Most of the manuscripts containing our texts have been dated, either paleographically or by their colophons, to the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries.⁹⁷ The dating of the Christian Palestinian Aramaic lectionary manuscript (Westminster MS, "Palestinian Syriac Lectionary") is uncertain,⁹⁸ but the eleventh century seems to be an approximate terminus after which certain Arabic-speaking Melkites ceased to describe the Theophany as the Kalends. Conversely, this use of the term "Kalends" is perhaps much older than its earliest documentation in the ninth century, and may even have been archaic by the time our texts were copied. The rubrics reflect the old Jerusalemite liturgy used in Palestine before the Byzantine rite gradually began to predominate in the centuries following the Islamic conquest.⁹⁹ Given this context, it is possible that referring to the Theophany as the Kalends was a feature of the Christian Palestinian Aramaic and later Arabic expression of this Jerusalemite system—though not of its better-attested Greek, Syriac, Armenian, or Georgian expressions.¹⁰⁰ If this usage was indeed a

feature of the old Jerusalemite liturgy—one handed down as the terminology of Aramaic lectionary rubrics was adapted to fit new Graeco-Arabic translations of scripture—then it may date to as early as the fifth or sixth century.¹⁰¹ This proposal must, however, remain speculative. In any case, by the ninth century at the very latest, certain Palestinian Melkite communities, perhaps primarily at monastic centers, had begun to refer to the Theophany as the Kalends. Was the usage wider?

To answer that question, we must broaden our investigation beyond the provenance and general features of the lectionary and the New Testament translations. We can begin by analyzing the rubrics in which the term "Kalends" occurs and the lessons these rubrics accompany. The rubrics and lessons routinely connect this new name for the Theophany not merely with the feast day's baptismal associations but specifically with the consecration of holy water that occurs during its vigil. We learn that, as in the Byzantine rite, Mark 1:1–13—describing Christ's baptism—is to be recited "on the vigil of the Kalends (*al-QLND*) [= Theophany] at night when the holy water is consecrated."¹⁰² For both the vigil and the day of the "Kalends" or Theophany (*QLNDā* in Christian Palestinian Aramaic, *al-QLND* in Arabic), we find further lessons invoking baptism or deploying water imagery, also similar to those of the Byzantine rite.¹⁰³ While

97 Sinai ar. 155 dates to the ninth century but is likely a copy of an older manuscript, as first observed by Gibson, *An Arabic Version of the Epistles of St. Paul*, 5–8. Sinai ar. 74 is dated to ca. the ninth century, Sinai ar. 72 is dated to 897, and Sinai ar. 54 is dated to ca. the tenth century: see K. W. Clark, *Checklist of Manuscripts in St. Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai* (Washington, DC, 1952). Berlin or. oct. 1108 is dated to 1046–47. On this last manuscript see further B. Levin, *Die griechisch-arabische Evangelien-Übersetzung: Vat. Borg. ar. 95 und Ber. orient. oct. 1108* (Uppsala, 1938), 11–18.

98 Lewis, *A Palestinian Syriac Lectionary*, vi–vii, suspended judgment on the date of the manuscript. The liturgical content that the manuscript preserves has conventionally been dated to the sixth century: see R. F. Taft, "Lectionary," *ODB* 2:1201.

99 See with references Kashouh, *The Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, 18–19, and Zaki, "The Textual History of the Arabic Pauline Epistles," 400–403. On the gradual predominance of the Byzantine rite, see Galadza, *Liturgy and Byzantinization*.

100 We must be cautious in attributing the term "Kalends," meaning Theophany, to the Jerusalemite liturgy as whole: the term's use is limited to the Christian Palestinian Aramaic and Arabic sources under discussion. Apart from al-Bīrūnī's mention of the 1 January Kalends already discussed above, the term "Kalends" appears nowhere in the sources summarized by D. Galadza, "Various

Orthodoxies: Feasts of the Incarnation of Christ in Jerusalem during the First Christian Millennium," in *Prayer and Worship in Eastern Christianities, 5th to 11th Centuries*, ed. B. Bitton-Ashkelony and D. Krueger (London, 2016), 181–209 at 195–97 (table 9.2, covering 24 December through 14 January in the Jerusalemite liturgy).

101 A sixth-century dating for the rubrication was favored by Baumstark, "Die sonntägliche Evangelienlesung"; his arguments for the dating of the Arabic gospel translations' composition are no longer accepted. On the controversy surrounding the dating of the rubrication and its use in debates over the date of the composition of those translations, see with references Kashouh, *The Arabic Versions of the Gospels*, 18–19.

102 Sinai ar. 72, fol. 37r = Arbache, *Une version arabe des évangiles*, 2:6 = Garitte, "Les rubriques liturgiques," 158 no. 1: *awwalu qirā'atin minhu tuqrā'u fī laylati l-QLNDi bi-l-layli bīna yuqaddasu l-mā'u l-muqaddasu*. Cf. Berlin or. oct. 1108, fol. 53r, which reads "*awwalu qirā'atin minhu tuqrā'u fī laylati l-QLNDi*," and Sinai ar. 74, fol. 67v, and Sinai ar. 54, fol. 13r, which both read "*awwalu qirā'atin minhu tuqrā'u fī laylati l-QLNDi bi-l-layli*."

103 According to Westminster MS, "Palestinian Syriac Lectionary," fols. 50a–56b = Lewis, *A Palestinian Syriac Lectionary*, 36–40, Isaiah 35:1–10, Isaiah 40:1–8, and Isaiah 44:2–7 were to be read "for the Kalends [= Theophany]" (*l-QLNDā*) and Titus 2:11–15 was to

“Kalends” in these texts thus referred to the Theophany and its memorial of Christ’s baptism generally, it is strongly associated in both the rubrics and the readings they accompany with the consecration of the holy water and with water imagery.

This association with the consecration of the holy water is, in fact, important when we turn our attention toward the broader social currency the term “Kalends” may have enjoyed as a designation of the Theophany. One Christian Arabic text, the so-called Archelides legend, hints that some Melkite Christians beyond the authors and users of the lectionary rubrics may have deployed it to describe the Theophany. However, the evidence is ambiguous. The legend of the allegedly fourth-century saint Archelides survives in Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, and Garshuni Arabic versions. The Syriac version is the earliest, as one manuscript dates to the ninth century.¹⁰⁴ The three Arabic versions—which the texts’ editor, Arent Jan Wensinck, labeled A, B, and C—were compiled at an unknown date, with the oldest manuscript dating to 1545.¹⁰⁵ Early in the narrative, the young Archelides has decided to become a monk, and after wandering from country to country he at last finds himself at the door of a certain monastery, where he beseeches the doorkeeper for entry. Unlike Arabic version B and the earlier Syriac recensions, both Arabic version A and Arabic version C

specify the time of Archelides’ arrival: the “eve of the Kalends” (*fī laylat al-QLNDS*).¹⁰⁶

In the absence of further evidence, it would be natural to take this phrase to mean the night of 31 December, the eve of the secular festival of the Kalends. Indeed, not just the spelling of the word with a *sīn* but also the narrative context would seem to support this interpretation. After all, Archelides’ wandering from place to place and his importuning of the doorkeeper recall the going around from door to door associated with the festival of the Kalends by Libanius, Asterius, and al-Bīrūnī. However, version C of the text—which is clearly a later expansion of version A¹⁰⁷—includes a gloss. In C, after “*fī laylati l-QLNDSi*” we read “*‘a’nī laylata quddāsi l-mā’i*” (I mean the night of the consecration [or sacrament] of the water).¹⁰⁸ This appended gloss indicates that the compiler of C understood A’s “eve of the Kalends” as meaning “vigil of the Theophany.” Arabic version C of the life of Archelides thus provides precious evidence that at least one reader outside the authors and users of the lectionary rubrics understood the term “Kalends” to mean “Theophany.” However, the gloss proves nothing about what the author of Arabic version A intended by “*laylat al-QLNDS*,” and it would be hazardous to speculate further.¹⁰⁹

How then are we to interpret this Palestinian Melkite usage of “Kalends” to mean “Theophany,” and how are we to square it with the evidence presented in sections 3 and 4? What broader significance does this evidence have for our understanding of the continued celebration of the secular festival of the Kalends in the southeastern Mediterranean world in the Islamic period? Considered in light of the fourth- and fifth-century evidence provided by Chrysostom, Asterius, and Gregory of Nyssa in section 2, this new Arabic and Christian Palestinian Aramaic usage would seem to

be read at both the vigil and at the midday mass (*bāḍa li-l-laylati l-QLNDi wa-li-nuṣṣi anḥārīn fī l-quddāsi*), with Isaiah 12:1–6 and apparently 1 Corinthians 10:1–4 being read at the consecration of the water. According to Sinai ar. 155, fol. 66r = Gibson, *An Arabic Version of the Epistles of St. Paul*, 55, 1 Corinthians 10:1 (with the end of the lesson not indicated) was to be read “on the day of the fast of the Kalends [= Theophany] during the mass” (*fī yawmi ṣawmi l-QLNDi fī l-quḍusi* [sic]). (A second recension of this collection of the Pauline epistles contained across Sinai ar. 73 [early tenth century] and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ar. 6725, contains rubrics that generally follow those of the first recension. However, we find no corresponding rubric at 1 Corinthians 10:1 [= Sinai ar. 73, fol. 22r] and hence cannot evaluate whether the users of the second recension deployed the term *al-QLND*. A third recension contained in both Sinai ar. 159 [twelfth century] and Sinai ar. 160 [thirteenth century] deploys instead a post-Byzantinization system of rubrics and is therefore not relevant for the present study. On these recensions, see Zaki, “The Textual History of the Arabic Pauline Epistles.”)

104 A. J. Wensinck, ed., *Legends of Eastern Saints Chiefly from Syriac Sources*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1911–13), 1: xiv–xv, viii–xix.

105 Wensinck, *Legends of Eastern Saints*, 1: xv–xviii.

106 Wensinck, *Legends of Eastern Saints*, 1: 19 (Arabic; Version A), 1: 31 (Arabic; Version C).

107 Wensinck, *Legends of Eastern Saints*, 1: xv–xvii.

108 Wensinck, *Legends of Eastern Saints*, 1: 31 (Arabic).

109 Baumstark, “Zur arabischen Archelideslegende,” was the first to observe this connection between the Archelides legend and the lectionary rubrics. But he neglected the evidence I have collected for the continued celebration of the 1 January Kalends and did not consider that the lack of the gloss in Arabic version A might indicate that that version’s author intended the 1 January Kalends, not the Theophany.

indicate the natural progression of a trend. Since the five days of the late ancient Kalends coincided with the vigil of the Theophany, some fourth- and fifth-century churchmen, as we saw, tried to downplay the secular festival and promote the sacred feast in its place. Evidently, this overlap or conflict continued in some form into the early Islamic period. By the ninth century at the latest, but perhaps much earlier, certain Melkites in Palestine had co-opted the secular festival altogether and were using its name as a designation for the Theophany. Yet it is unclear if this co-optation should be read as evidence for the decline of the secular festival of the Kalends or as a sign of its enduring popularity. Were the authors of the lectionary rubrics able to adopt the name “Kalends” for the Theophany because the secular festival was on the decline? Or did they co-opt the name precisely because the secular festival was still popular, perhaps even a force to be reckoned with?

Certainly, the evidence presented above in sections 3 and 4 suggests that the secular festival was in riotous good health well into the tenth century, especially to the north in Antioch. While al-Muqaddasī, ‘Alī ibn ‘Īsā, and to some extent al-Mas‘ūdī leave open the possibility for a blending of Kalends and Theophany, Bar Bahlul and al-Bīrūnī present the 1 January festivities as quite separate from the solemnities of 6 January, for which they both reserve separate mention.¹¹⁰ In the absence of further evidence, we must conclude that the secular festival of the Kalends continued in force through the tenth century among Melkite Christians in the southeastern Mediterranean and was even observed, to some extent, by Muslims. Yet the same tension between the secular and the sacred festal calendar already present in late antiquity continued in this region in the Islamic period. While al-Bīrūnī’s Ḥwārazmian Melkites sacralized the Kalends by connecting it with St. Basil’s feast day and even with Christ’s Nativity, the authors and users of these Palestinian lectionary rubrics went a step further by reassigning the name “Kalends” to the Theophany. Still, our discussion of the festival’s possible decline raises an important question. When did Melkite Christians in the Islamic world finally cease to celebrate the Kalends?

110 Bar Bahlul (Ibn Bahlūl), *Kitāb al-dalā’il* (n. 57 above), 117; al-Bīrūnī, *Āṭār* (n. 34 above), 293 (trans. *Al-Bīrūnī’s India* [n. 41 above], 288).

6. When Did the Kalends Cease to Be Celebrated? The Kalends in Post-Eleventh-Century Arabic Sources

Anthony Kaldellis has demonstrated that the Kalends’ obsolescence in Byzantium occurred sometime after 1200.¹¹¹ And regarding the testimonies to the celebration of the Kalends in the medieval Islamic East analyzed above, the latest securely datable evidence comes from al-Bīrūnī’s *Āṭār*, written around 1000, while most of our other sources date to not much earlier. Does evidence from Near Eastern texts composed after al-Bīrūnī’s work shed further light on the problem of the Kalends and their eventual obsolescence in the Islamic world? This section will address that important question, concluding tentatively that at least in the eastern Mediterranean Melkite heartlands, the celebration of the Kalends came to an end sometime between roughly 1000 and 1300.

Hady Roger Idris and Mīḥā’il ‘Awwād have, between them, cited a handful of references to the Kalends in post-eleventh-century Arabic sources as witnesses to their continued celebration. However, these citations are false leads. In one, Idris has simply misidentified a reference by al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442), who describes not the Kalends but a Fāṭimid ceremony celebrating the Islamic New Year.¹¹² In all the other instances, these later sources are manifestly recycling earlier reports on the Kalends that I have already reviewed and hence provide no independent testimony. Let us consider each in turn. Idris pointed to a reference in an agricultural treatise by the Andalusian Ibn al-‘Awwām (d. 1145) as evidence for the celebration of the festival under that name in twelfth-century Islamic Spain.¹¹³ In fact, the reference occurs within a verbatim quotation from the

111 Kaldellis, “The Kalends in Byzantium” (n. 6 above), 203.

112 Idris, “Fêtes chrétiennes” (n. 8 above), 268, citing al-Maqrīzī, *al-Mawā’iz wa-l-i’tibār fī dīkr al-ḥiṭaṭ wa-l-āṭār*, ed. A. F. Sayyid, 6 vols. (London, 2002), 2:591–92. In fact, the *maṣīm ra’s al-sana* and the *maṣīm awwal al-‘ām* are not separate holidays but separate festal ceremonies, both celebrating the Islamic New Year. The second—not the first, as Idris claims—involved the caliph’s procession, which is described at much greater length at al-Maqrīzī, *Ḥiṭaṭ*, 2:461–77. See further M. Espéronnier, “Les fêtes civiles et les cérémonies d’origine antique sous les Fatimides d’Égypte,” *Der Islam* 65.1 (1988): 46–59, with references to the earlier scholarship. The Kalends had, at any rate, long since ceased to be an official New Year’s celebration.

113 Idris, “Fêtes chrétiennes,” 267. Idris does not appear to have consulted the text of Ibn al-‘Awwām itself but was dependent on

passage in Ibn Waḥṣiyya's *al-Filāḥa al-nabaṭiyya* discussed above in section 2 and thus sheds no light on Andalusian festival practices.¹¹⁴ A would-be testimony in a work by the Iranian author al-Qazwīnī (d. 1283) cited by 'Awwād is on closer inspection a truncated, but otherwise verbatim, quotation of al-Mas'ūdī's report on the Kalends in the *Murūḡ al-dahab* reviewed in section 3.¹¹⁵ Al-Mas'ūdī's report is also clearly the source for both references to the Kalends in an encyclopedic compendium by the Mamlūk-era Egyptian bureaucrat al-Qalqaṣandī (d. 1418), whom Idris cites erroneously as an independent witness.¹¹⁶ Like Ibn al-'Awwām, neither al-Qazwīnī nor al-Qalqaṣandī provides testimony to the continued celebration of the Kalends after the eleventh century. If anything,

al-Qalqaṣandī can be read as testifying to the festival's obsolescence, at least in his native Egypt. In reproducing al-Mas'ūdī's report, he omits Egypt from that historian's list of countries in which Christians celebrate the Kalends—perhaps because the claim bore no resemblance to his observed reality in fourteenth-century Egypt. In any case, all three writers—Ibn al-'Awwām, al-Qazwīnī, and al-Qalqaṣandī—are simply transmitting book learning from earlier sources and cannot be read as providing evidence for the continued celebration of the Kalends in their respective milieux.

Two references to the Kalends made by fourteenth-century Damascene writers cannot be definitively attributed to earlier sources. However, while they are brief and hard to interpret, I will tentatively argue that neither bears witness to the Kalends' continued celebration in the fourteenth century and that in fact the Kalends had by that time ceased as a major public festival in Syria. The first reference occurs in a list of Christian festivals given by the great Ḥanbalī jurist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) in his *al-Ḡawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, a lengthy refutation of Christianity written in Damascus no earlier than 1316.¹¹⁷ As part of his narrative of later Christians' corruption of the prophet Christ's religion, Ibn Taymiyya alleges that all the festivals he lists were instituted by human agents long after Christ. He briefly mentions "the festival of the Kalends" (*id al-QLNDS*) alongside Christmas and other Christian holidays.¹¹⁸

Does Ibn Taymiyya's reference to the Kalends testify to the festival's continued celebration in Syria? After examining the reference against the backdrop of the jurist's other works, which are more practically oriented, I argue that in fact it does not. Ibn Taymiyya's *Iqtidā' al-ṣirāt al-mustaḳīm*, written sometime before 1315/16, gives a thoroughgoing account of major Christian festivals that many Muslims celebrate

R. P. A. Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1881), 2:297.

114 Ibn al-'Awwām, *Kitāb al-filāḥa*, in *Libro de agricultura su autor el Doctor excelente Abu Zacaria Iahia*, ed. and trans. J. A. Banqueri (Madrid, 1802), reprinted in facsimile with preliminary notes by E. García Sánchez and J. E. Hernández Bermejo, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1988), 2:88. The name "Sūsād" (Spanish trans. "Susado") printed in the edition and translation represents "Yanbūṣād" (يَنْبُوشَاد), which is easily misread as "Sūsād" (سُوسَاد) in unpointed Arabic script.

115 'Awwād, ed., in Hilāl al-Ṣābi', *Rusūm* (n. 10 above), 24, n. 5, citing al-Qazwīnī, *Āḡā'ib al-maḥlūqāt*, in *Zakariya Ben Muhammed Ben Mahmud el-Cazwini's Kosmographie*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, 2 vols. (Göttingen, 1849), 1:76. Indeed, al-Qazwīnī has manifestly borrowed most of the material in this section from other sources such as al-Mas'ūdī and the thirteenth chapter of al-Bīrūnī's *Ātār*. Al-Qazwīnī's frequent verbatim borrowings from earlier authors are well known: see T. Lewicki, "al-Qazwīnī," *ET*² (accessed via BrillOnline).

116 Idris, "Fêtes chrétiennes," 268, citing al-Qalqaṣandī, *Ṣubḥ al-aṣṣā*, 14 vols. (Cairo, 1922), 2:385, 419. Idris notes that al-Qalqaṣandī names al-Mas'ūdī as his source in the second instance, but seems unaware that the Egyptian author's first reference to the Kalends is borrowed nearly verbatim from al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūḡ al-dahab* (n. 7 above) §1290, without attribution. Interestingly, the second citation describes the Kalends as ushering in the new year like the Coptic Nayrūz, explaining that January is the first of the months of the Romans or Byzantines (*al-rūm*)—an antiquarian anachronism. Al-Qalqaṣandī had no need to look any further than al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūḡ al-dahab* §1297, for this information, though his use of the more Arabized form of the month's name may indicate the influence of a second source. Al-Qalqaṣandī also deploys the Arabized spellings for the Roman month names at *Ṣubḥ al-aṣṣā*, 2:385, where he again explains their correspondence with the Syrian months. The spelling *al-QLNDS*—where Pellat's edition of the *Murūḡ* has *al-QLNDS*—may reflect a variant reading in the manuscript of al-Mas'ūdī he had before him or it may indicate that al-Qalqaṣandī has accessed other Arabic sources beyond al-Mas'ūdī.

117 On the dating of the works by Ibn Taymiyya that I cite, see J. Hoover, "Ibn Taymiyya," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 4 (1200–1350), ed. D. Thomas and A. Mallett (Leiden, 2012), 824–78.

118 Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Ḡawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-masīḥ*, ed. 'Alī ibn Ḥasan ibn Nāṣir, 'Abd al-Azīz ibn Ibrāhīm al-Askar, and Ḥamdān ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥamdān, 7 vols. (Riyadh, 1993–99), 1:364–66; translated into English as *A Muslim Theologian's Response to Christianity*, ed. and trans. T. F. Michel (New York, 1984), 163–64. However, when he repeats a similar list of innovative holidays elsewhere at *al-Ḡawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 3:29–30 (*A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 237), Ibn Taymiyya omits the Kalends.

with their Christian neighbors—a practice that Ibn Taymiyya is at pains to discourage. In his chronologically ordered account, Ibn Taymiyya skips directly from Christmas Eve to the 6 January celebration of Epiphany or Theophany (*al-ġiṭās*) without mentioning the Kalends.¹¹⁹ Similarly, in a *fatwā* ruling against Muslim participation in non-Muslim holidays, Ibn Taymiyya makes no mention of the Kalends.¹²⁰ Had they still enjoyed the wide popularity ascribed to them by al-Mas'ūdī and al-Muqaddasī in the tenth-century testimonies reviewed in section 3, we would expect Ibn Taymiyya to mention them in the *Iqtidā'* and in his *fatwā*. The Kalends had at the very least ceased to be an occasion of major public revelry in fourteenth-century Damascus. Taken in the context of his other writings, then, Ibn Taymiyya's nod to the Kalends in his *al-Ġawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ* may reflect nothing more than the jurist's wide reading on historical Christianity.

A second mention of the Kalends by a Damascene contemporary of Ibn Taymiyya's, when examined in context, confirms that the festival was likely obsolescent in fourteenth-century Syria. As first noted by 'Alī ibn Ḥasan ibn Nāṣir and his colleagues,¹²¹ the term “Kalends” (*al-QLNDS*) occurs in another refutation of Christianity, written in 1321 by the Šūfī intellectual Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimašqī, who seems to connect it with the relatively minor Feast of Christ's Circumcision, celebrated by Orthodox Christians on 1 January.¹²² In a discussion of Christian *tahrīf*, or scriptural distortion,

al-Dimašqī alleges that both canonical and apocryphal Christian scriptures describe Christ as sexually impotent.¹²³ He connects this alleged impotence with Christ's circumcision: “They performed *al-QLNDS*, which means circumcision, so that no human deficiency could be ascribed to his humanity, and because the Gospels witness that Christ's mother had him circumcised on the eighth day after his birth.”¹²⁴

Remarkably, al-Dimašqī does not seem aware that *al-QLNDS* was originally the name of a holiday, taking it instead to be a foreign word meaning “the act of circumcision.” I tentatively suggest that the Šūfī writer is reflecting, in a confused way, a contemporary Damascene Melkite usage whereby the term *al-QLNDS* had ceased to refer to the revelries of the Kalends and, when deployed at all, was understood instead to mean the Feast of Christ's Circumcision, also celebrated on 1 January.¹²⁵ This slippage in meaning suggests that while Muslims and Christians understood the connection between the historical term “Kalends” and 1 January, the festivities that had once marked that date were a thing of the past.

Much must remain uncertain, and further references to the Kalends in sources written after 1000 may be identified and provide greater clarity. Still, in the absence of such testimonies, we should look to the period after 1000 for the ancient festival's decline and eventual obsolescence in the eastern Islamic world. The combined evidence from Ibn Taymiyya and al-Dimašqī suggests that though the name of the Kalends was still known in the fourteenth century, the public revelries

119 Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb iqtidā' al-ṣirāt al-mustaḳīm muḥālāfat aṣḥāb al-ġaḥīm*, ed. Nāṣir ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-'Aql, 2 vols. (Riyadh, 1998), 2:11; translated into English in M. U. Memon, *Ibn Taymiyya's Struggle against Popular Religion: With an Annotated Translation of His Kitāb iqtidā' al-ṣirāt al-mustaḳīm muḥālāfat aṣḥāb al-jaḥīm* (The Hague, 1976), 222.

120 Ibn Taymiyya in *Maḡmū' fatāwā ṣayḥ al-Islām Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Qāsim and Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad, 37 vols. (Riyadh, 1961–67), 25:329–32. It should be noted that Michel, in his translation of Ibn Taymiyya, *A Muslim Theologian's Response*, 82–84, speculates that Ibn Taymiyya composed this *fatwā* slightly earlier than the other works under discussion, during his time in Egypt. If that were proven to be the case, then the *fatwā*'s omission of the Kalends would bear more directly on Egypt than on Syria.

121 'Alī ibn Ḥasan ibn Nāṣir, 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Ibrāhīm al-'Askar, and Ḥamdān ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥamdān, in Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Ġawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 1:365, n. 2, on the basis of images of a manuscript of the then still unpublished work.

122 Al-Dimašqī, *Ġawāb risālat ahl ḡazīrat qubruṣ* §43, in *Muslim-Christian Polemic during the Crusades: The Letter from the People of*

Cyprus and Ibn Abī Ṭālib al-Dimašqī's Response, ed. and trans. R. Ebied and D. Thomas (Leiden, 2005), 260–61.

123 See Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic*, 261, n. 11, on the ambiguity.

124 Al-Dimašqī, *Ġawāb* §43 (I quote the translation of Ebied and Thomas, *Muslim-Christian Polemic*, 260–61): *wa-amalū l-QLNDSa llaḍī ma'nāhu l-ḥitānu li-allā yunsaba ilā nāsūtihī naqṣu ḥalqin wali-anna l-inḡilāti šāhidatun bi-anna umma l-masīḥi ḥatanathu tāmīna yawmi wilādatihī*. The transition between the discussion of Christ's alleged impotence and his circumcision is abrupt and not rendered any clearer by the two unintelligible, presumably miscopied words *q'r 'lw'* that stand before the sentence I quote.

125 We might compare an Arabic gloss in one recension of Bar Bahlul's lexicon redefining the Kalends as “the day of the circumcision of our lord Jesus Christ” (*yawmu ḥitānati sayyidinā yasū'a l-masīḥi*): see Bar Bahlul, *Lexicon* (n. 33 above), 3:1793–94, n. 18. The Arabic form of the name of Jesus deployed suggests a western origin for the gloss.

that had for so long characterized the start of January had finally ceased in urban Syria—and perhaps elsewhere in the Islamic East as well.

7. Continuity and Change in the Celebration of the Kalends

The Kalends of January continued to be celebrated in the Near East from late antiquity to at least 1000 CE, with the festival's obsolescence likely occurring sometime before 1300. From the eastern Mediterranean seaboard to what is now Uzbekistan, Melkite Christians kept the Kalends alive. Yet Near Eastern Muslims recognized the festival as well, even if they did not celebrate it with the same enthusiasm as Muslims in North Africa and al-Andalus did the *yannayr*.

From gift giving to door-to-door caroling to torchlit processions and feasting, eastern Kalends customs remained remarkably continuous from Graeco-Roman antiquity through the Islamic Middle Ages. Even as 1 January ceased to be the formal start of the new year for Melkite communities, our sources continue to associate the Kalends with acts of disclosure and inauguration—the opening of a church door to Basil's troupe of Orthodox faithful, the start of the ancient Roman calendar, the point in a narrative when a young man crosses a monastery's threshold and converts to the monastic way.¹²⁶ In light of these associations, it is just possible that, as was the case in late twelfth-century Byzantium,¹²⁷ some Melkites who celebrated the Kalends still considered them as the informal start of the year, a time worth celebrating to secure good luck in the coming months. Even when, in a continuation of a trend begun in late antiquity, some Palestinian Melkites appropriated the name "Kalends" for the feast of the Theophany, this association with new starts could still be felt in that feast's celebration of baptism.

If the story of the Kalends in the Islamic East is one of continuity with late antiquity, it is also one of change in the form of the secular festival's gradual sacralization.

The adoption of the name "Kalends" for the Theophany is only one radical example of this phenomenon. Less radically, other Melkites associated the 1 January Kalends with Christ's Nativity, with St. Basil's feast day, and even possibly with the Feast of the Circumcision. This sacralization may explain why beast mummery and other carnivalesque elements of the late ancient Kalends seem to have disappeared, or at least go unmentioned beyond the ambiguous and early reference to cross-dressing by George, bishop of the Arab tribes. The tendency toward the Kalends' sacralization in the Islamic East stands in stark contrast to its treatment in contemporary Byzantium, where the Kalends remained largely secular and could still be denounced as pagan by a late twelfth-century churchman.¹²⁸ For their part, mid-tenth-century Antiochene church authorities still living at that time under Islamic rule appear quite comfortable with the Kalends, at least according to the historian al-Mas'ūdī. Particularly striking is the explicit connection between the Kalends and Orthodoxy's triumph observed among al-Bīrūnī's Ḥwārazmian Melkites. As Melkites became a minority population within an Islamic society populated by other, larger Christian sects, perhaps they sacralized this ancient and apparently uniquely Chalcedonian holiday in order to render it a marker of Orthodox identity.

We must be cautious in generalizing, however. My analysis has depended on a relatively small number of sources, almost all of which were produced by elite non-Melkites observing the Kalends from the outside. When these authors consulted Melkites, as al-Bīrūnī appears to have done, their informants were likely churchmen or other elite members of the Melkite community, not ordinary celebrators of the Kalends. Even the Palestinian monks who produced and copied the lectionary rubrics I have cited may not represent the approach to this folk festival taken by the general Melkite population. Further evidence, particularly from sources preserving Melkite voices, would fill in the portrait of the medieval Islamic Kalends that I have sketched. In this regard, we are fortunate. Medieval Arabic literature is vast and much of it unpublished or underresearched. There is every reason

126 One might also again observe the Syriac lexicographers' etymology deriving "Kalends" from the word for "key": see n. 33 above.

127 Theodore Balsamon, *Commentary on Trullo*, in *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἱερῶν κανόνων τῶν τε Ἀγίων καὶ πανευφύμων Ἀποστόλων, καὶ τῶν Ἱερῶν καὶ Οἰκουμενικῶν καὶ τοπικῶν Συνόδων, καὶ τῶν κατὰ μέρος Ἀγίων Πατέρων*, ed. G. A. Rallis and M. Potlis, 6 vols. (Athens, 1852–59; repr. Athens, 1992), 2:450 = PG 137:728C–D.

128 Theodore Balsamon, *Commentary on Trullo*, 2:449–52 = PG 137:727–31. Kaldellis, "The Kalends in Byzantium" (n. 6 above), 198–200, views the neutral, antiquarian stances of Psellus, Tzetzes, and Eustathius toward the popular and secular Kalends as more representative of Byzantine attitudes than the stance of Balsamon.

to hope that future studies will identify further, richer testimonies to the continued celebration of this Roman holiday in the medieval Islamic East.

Until then, my study has securely established the continued celebration of the Kalends of January from the first Islamic century through at least 1000 CE, from the eastern Mediterranean to Central Asia. While observation of the Kalends had probably ceased by the early fourteenth century, many continued to celebrate this late ancient Roman holiday throughout the early Islamic period with the same customs documented in fourth- and fifth-century Greek sources—from feasting and torchlight to gift giving and door-to-door caroling.

The Kalends of January thus provide an important, and previously neglected, case study for addressing the long-debated question of cultural and social continuity between the late ancient Roman and early Islamic worlds. From the perspective of the Kalends of January, at least, Roman late antiquity was long indeed.

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